The ADVENTURE BOYS and the ISLAND of SAPPHIRES

by
AMES
THOMPSON

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THOMPSON

CUPPLES & LEON CO.

HE RAISED THE LID, THEN GAVE A LOUD, TERRIFIED SHOUT.
"Adventure Boys and the Island of Sapphires." Page 60

THE ADVENTURE BOYS AND THE ISLAND OF SAPPHIRES

By

AMES THOMPSON

ILLUSTRATED

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THE JEWEL SERIES

By AMES THOMPSON

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THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the Valley of Diamonds

THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the River of Emeralds

THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the Lagoon of Pearls

THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the Temple of Rubies

THE ADVENTURE BOYS
And the Island of Sapphires

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THE ADVENTURE BOYS AND THE ISLAND OF SAPPHIRES

CHAPTER I

WAITING FOR FARLEY

"WHAT'S the good word, Ralph?" Jimmy Stone fairly shot the eager question at his approaching comrade, Ralph Edwards, as Edwards came hurrying toward him across the wide space of the Arlington lounge.

"Not one little thing stirring," Ralph called out in a dejected tone. The shadow resting upon his usually merry face communicated itself to the group of four men lined in a waiting row upon a deep-cushioned leather davenport. "She hasn't been sighted yet. The man I had on the 'phone from the Clegg Line office said there had been a rippety-whooping old gale out at sea. It is feared the *Arana* has been caught in it and gone down."

"Cricky!" exclaimed Bret Hartson. "That's tough luck for the *Arana!* I thought those big liners were built to weather most any old gale. How about it, Green? You're our little nautical encyclopedia." He turned hopefully to Stanley Green.

"They are built that way," Green affirmed with a reassuring nod of his dark head. "There is plenty of chance to hear better news of the *Arana* yet. She's only two days overdue. It's likely she's been blown out of her course. She may come in sight O.K. by to-morrow morning. The Clegg Line launches the best lot of passenger boats going."

"Glad you can hand us such encouraging dope, Skipper Green," Ralph brightened. "When an old sea dog like you talks, we've just got to listen."

"I've seen a few gales, but why remind me of my age? I missed the Civil War, you know, and I've still hair on my venerable head and teeth in my ancient jaws." Green's white teeth flashed into humorous evidence.

"Don't get touchy, Boy. Don't you know a compliment from a razzberry?" Ralph fixed his eyes upon Green in pretended reproof. "Stop and think of all you know about seas and oceans."

"That's mighty little," Green said soberly. "The sea is the world's great mystery. I've followed it long enough to have learned that."

"Wish I knew even a little of what you know about the deep sea game," Ralph's words carried lively admiration. He had admired and respected Green's knowledge of both sea and shore since the early days of their acquaintance when on board the *Wanderer,* a tramp steamer, bound for Africa.

"Oh, forget it." Green made a quick half-embarrassed gesture. "You had best call up the Clegg office again this evening. The *Arana* may heave in sight between now and dark."

"Watch me keep the wire hot between the hotel and the Clegg office," Ralph made energetic reply. "Isn't that the way to do, Oom Bossy Edwards?" He accompanied his light question by an affectionate whanging of his father's shoulder.

"You've said it." Malcolm Edwards, black-haired, gray-eyed, resolute of mouth and chin, looked mild amusement of his forceful son.

"You bet I have. Leave it to Oom Bossy Ralph always to do the proper thing at the proper moment." Ralph inflated his chest and bowed right and left.

"I'll say you always *do*—except when you do it wrong," conceded Jimmy Stone derisively.

"Now, James, don't be jealous." Ralph resumed his former place in the davenport row, managing, as he sat down, to land heavily upon Jimmy.

"Don't try to put me out of business," Jimmy retorted, pushing Ralph smartly off his knee and shoving him over upon Stanley Green.

"Here, you needn't pass him on to me, Stone. I want to live, too." Green bumped Ralph over again upon Jimmy.

"Gee whiz, but you are a hospitable pair of roughnecks!" Ralph settled himself on the davenport with buoyant force, contriving at the

same time to give Jimmy and Green each a vigorous punch with his elbows.

"Behave, Bossy Ralph, or else take what comes," threatened Jimmy.

"Yes, watch yourself, Boy, or I may get into this, too. Then you will be sorry," Bret Hartson worked his right arm with lazy suggestiveness.

"Uh-h-h! Is that so? Come on, then. I'd love to have you start something," tantalized Ralph. "Oh, confound it!" His jesting tone had changed to one of regretful earnestness. The memory of his recent errand to the telephone booth had again gripped him. "What a blamed shame of the pestiferous old ocean to kick up a storm just now. Farley was never intended for fish food. He's got to come through safely. I can't think of it as any other way than that."

Readers of the "Jewel Series" already know the Adventure Boys. These readers will recall the strange way in which the five adventurers, Malcolm Edwards, Ralph Edwards, his son, Jimmy Stone, Bret Hartson and Stanley Green, were brought together, and of how they followed the South African veldt trail to the hidden valley of diamonds. Their adventures on the veldt and in the secret valley will be found in "The Adventure Boys and the Valley of Diamonds."

Later, the jewel trail called them to Peru and the story of their memorable hunt for emeralds

on the heights of the Andes has been recorded in "The Adventure Boys and the River of Emeralds."

"The Adventure Boys and the Lagoon of Pearls," tells the story of their adventures in pearl gleaning in the South Seas amid perilous days among head-hunting cannibals.

Love of jewel hunting afterward took the adventurers, on their yacht, the *Swallow,* to Burma in quest of pidgeon-blood rubies. Readers of "The Adventure Boys and the Temple of Rubies," will remember the exciting trail of mystery and adventure which Ralph broke into when he purchased a miniature temple of flawless rubies in an East Indian bazaar in Calcutta. It was at the beginning of that perilous expedition into the Burma hills that the adventurers had met and subsequently declared friendship with a young Englishman, Arthur Farley, and his sister, Margaret, the rightful owners of the little temple, which had been lost to them for many years. The strange disappearance of the temple on the day on which it was purchased by Ralph, and the remarkable manner in which it was restored to the Farleys, through the efforts of the Adventure Boys has been fully set forth in this story. Following the restoration of the temple into his hands, Arthur Farley had sailed for England, there to acquaint his sister with the good news and place the temple in her care for future safe keeping.

Before sailing for England Arthur Farley had promised the Adventure Boys that he would return in the fall to India in order to accompany them on a second ruby-seeking expedition to the Burma hills. While awaiting his coming they had enjoyed themselves by cruising along the East India Coast on their yacht, the *Swallow.* Nearly two weeks had passed since they had docked once more in the Calcutta harbor and gone ashore. They had returned to their former headquarters, the Arlington Hotel, there to await the arrival of Arthur Farley. The depressing report that the *Arana,* the liner on which their friend had sailed from Liverpool, had not yet been sighted had filled the adventurers with gloomy concern. Only the good news of the *Arana's* delayed appearance would lift the shadow that hung over the anxious little group of watchers for her safe arrival into port.

A concerned silence followed Ralph's cry regarding their comrade, Farley. Ralph finally broke it by springing to his feet with the quick exclamation, "I've been promised a ring from the Clegg office the minute the *Arana* is heard from! Hope that will be soon. If the Clegg man doesn't ring me up before dinner, I'll call him right after dinner. He may forget about it. I'm going to camp on his trail."

Dinner time came without bringing the anxious adventurers news of the *Arana.* Directly after dinner Ralph scurried to a telephone

booth to "keep the wire hot." He met with disappointment. The *Arana* was still among the missing.

After dinner the Edwards party steered once more for the roomy davenport which they had been occupying before the meal. They were fortunate in finding it empty and again disposed themselves upon it in an uneasy row.

Since their return to Calcutta from their cruise they had come to feel more than ever at home in the Arlington Hotel. Usually after dinner they preferred the comfortable privacy of their suite of rooms. To-night, however, their uneasy fears kept them downstairs in the lounge. There they continued to linger, a somewhat uncommunicative little company of comrades, indifferently watching the drifting tide of guests as it flowed into and out of the lounge.

At length Bret's natural love for the humorous got the better of his anxiety. "Say, fellows," he suddenly remarked with a chuckle; "look who's here. Name this rare old keepsake and you may have him to put on the piano." His waggish interest had been revived by the entrance into the lounge through the central doorway of the hotel of an odd-looking turbaned old native. "Some little great grandpa! What? He looks as though he'd been stored away in a packing case for a couple of centuries and had just managed to raise the lid and climb out."

"He certainly is an ancient affair." Green

was also showing signs of lively interest in the newcomer. "He's not a babu. He's dressed too well for one. Besides he isn't lugging along a begging bowl. That's a fine linen robe he is sporting, and there is class to his turban."

"Betcha he was hanging around over here when the Declaration of Independence was being signed in the U. S." Jimmy had caught the spirit of Bret's light humor. "He's a sure enough old-timer. Looks like a dandelion that's gone to seed. The kind that's all fluffy and ready to blow away at a puff of wind."

"You've named him — Dandelion. He's yours," Bret told Jimmy with a genial grin. "He seems to be looking for you. He surely must have heard of you, James, and all about what a wonderful guy you are."

"Oh, go chase yourself. Never try to kid me," Jimmy retorted, lazily, viewing Bret through half-closed eyes.

"Yep; I'm right," Bret continued with pretended enthusiasm. "He *has* heard about you, Stone. Here he comes. Straight as an arrow, and right to you, James."

Bret's teasing assertion that the aged East Indian was making a bee-line toward Jimmy was not idle. The old man was heading straight for the end of the davenport where Jimmy was sitting.

"Oh, keep quiet." Jimmy was struggling against a desire to laugh. "Turn a key on your ha-ha remarks. If I laugh in this old guy's

face, I'll know who to blame, and I'll have it out with you later."

He succeeded in sobering his face as the Hindoo neared the davenport. When within half a dozen feet of it, the old man stopped and began a peering, searching survey of the group of adventurers ranged upon it. His small black eyes moved deliberately from one face to another. They rested longest upon Stanley Green, and it was to Stanley instead of Jimmy he spoke.

"Young Sahib," he said in a high, reedy voice, but in plain English, "I have seen you before. Now I must speak to you. I ask you, 'Where is the Sahib Farley?' "

CHAPTER II

A MYSTERIOUS GUEST

A BREATH of amazed silence descended upon the adventurers for an instant, tying Green's tongue. Then he said evenly, suppressing surprise from his voice, "He is not here yet, but we hope he will soon be with us."

"That he is not here, I know. I ask you, where, then, is he?" The old man's repeated question vibrated with testy impatience. He frowned down upon Green who met the frown with his own cool, measuring glance.

"I wish I knew exactly where he is." A somber smile touched the sailor's firm lips. Came an awkward interval of silence during which Green took lightning stock of his impatient questioner. He decided to make a further explanation of his reply. "Sahib Farley sailed recently from England to Calcutta on the *Arana*. She has been storm-driven and is now two days overdue. We are waiting here tonight for news of her from the Clegg Company's office. You mention having seen me before to-day. May I ask you where, and when?"

"Can it be that I have come here too late!" Utterly disregarding Green's question, the Hindoo flung up his long arms in a despairing

gesture. "May Buddha aid me in my sorrow."

"Buddha is always merciful." Green's grave response seemed to comfort the old Hindoo. His arms fell to his sides as he leaned far forward to stare thoughtfully into the sailor's immobile features.

"It is well," he said. "You are the friend of the Sahib Farley. I shall wait here with you for the news of him. A budwallah shall bring me a chair."

"I'll bring you a chair." Ralph sprang up, swooping down upon a nearby cushioned leather chair. He placed it beside the davenport with a ready courtesy which brought an approving gleam to the Hindoo's eyes.

"Thank you, young Sahib." His thin, bony form seemed lost in the depths of the great chair. Only his gaunt features, surmounted by his jeweled turban rose with solemn dignity above his long thin neck.

In the folds of the turban winked three large jewels. It was the three jewels which first caught the eyes of the adventurers, then chained their admiring attention. Since jewel hunting was their occupation they were naturally interested in unusual stones, and these in the turban they recognized as such.

High up in the folds of the turban, and directly in front, was fastened a stone at which the jewel hunters stared in surprised admiration. They could recognize a white sapphire when they saw one, and this particular stone

was flawless in its glittering purity. On each side of the white sapphire was a blue one, and the two blue sapphires were fully as perfect in their color as the white stone.

"You have my permission to come and sit beside me." The Hindoo fixed his eyes upon Stanley Green. "I would speak with you about the Sahib Farley."

Malcolm Edwards, who had been occupying the end of the davenport nearest the arm chair which Ralph had placed for the Hindoo, rose instantly and motioned Green into his place.

"Thank you, Oom Bossy." Green gave Mr. Edwards an odd, flashing glance as he made the exchange of seats which said more plainly than words, "There's something stirring here."

The old man slid about in the big chair, peering shrewdly at Stanley. For a long moment he continued to survey Green without speaking. Then his high piping tones broke out with: "What name have you?"

"My name is Stanley Green," came the concise answer. "I now ask you, 'What is your name?' "

"You shall know in time—in time." The turbaned head nodded slowly on the repetition. "First, I will say to you that I saw you with the Sahib Farley in the street. I followed you, and saw you and him come here. That was three months ago—yes, it was three months ago. It was in the evening, and late, it was so

late that I had to go to my own home. I thought I would come to see the Sahib the next day, but instead I went away on a long journey. Now I have returned—but he is not here." The Hindoo relapsed into momentary gloomy abstraction.

Green said nothing, waiting patiently for the old man to continue. His comrades sat listening interestedly to the Hindoo, wondering what might come next. The curious individuality of the aged native, his peremptory manner and his usage of good English made them believe that he had come upon an errand of more than minor importance.

"He will return—yes, he will return." The Hindoo suddenly straightened up from the depths of the chair. He stared blankly across the lounge. "I see the ship," he went on. "The storm has passed. To-morrow, at noon, the Sahib Farley will be here."

"Some fortune teller," Bret mumbled in Ralph's ear.

"Uh, huh," Ralph breathed with unbelieving emphasis.

"Sahib Ralph Edwards, Sahib Ralph Edwards!" The long drawn-out droning of his name by a lounge boy who was paging him, brought Ralph up from the davenport with a bounce. "By the great horned spoon!" he exclaimed and darted down the lounge toward the boy.

The old Hindoo had dropped back in the

chair and was continuing his blank stare into space. He seemed not to see anything, or any one about him. Green's handsome face was now alight with interest. This was not the first time he had encountered a demonstration of the mysticism of the far East. He was too well versed in Orientalism to doubt but that the old man had the rare gift of second sight.

"Wouldn't it be queer if Dandelion had the right dope about the *Arana*?" Bret whispered excitedly to Malcolm Edwards. "Say, do you believe he saw what he said he saw?"

"I don't know." Malcolm Edwards' practicality had arrayed itself against such a belief. "I can tell you better when Ralph comes back," he added with a faint smile.

"Oh, shucks," muttered Jimmy, who had caught the whispered question, and the reply. "You can't hand me any such magic."

Nevertheless the four friends waited in curious suspense for Ralph's return from the telephone booth in the direction of which they had watched him hurry. The Hindoo still seemed to be wrapped in a trance.

"More likely we'll hear that the *Arana* hasn't been sighted yet," was Jimmy's skeptical opinion.

"Hah-h-h." Bret drew a long noisy breath as he spied Ralph emerge from the telephone booth and hurry across the lounge. "By gracious, look at Ralph. He's all smiles."

Ralph was approaching the davenport at a

jubilant walk only one move from a run. He was fairly beaming satisfaction.

"Oh, Boy, what do you think? The *Arana* has come through, O.K. She'd been knotting it right along, but a fog came up and hid her for a while. She's expected to dock at daylight to-morrow morning. Now *what* do you know about that?"

Ralph's significant question was not lost upon his comrades. The Hindoo's strange revelation had swept his mind with new force. He bent forward to his father and said humorously in the latter's ear: "Wake up Dandelion and ask him how he grabbed the news out of the air."

"Tell him, Stanley. I confess I'm flabbergasted," Malcolm Edwards said guardedly to Green. "This Hindoo certainly has me guessing. Let's hope he is some one Farley may care to see."

"He's a flighty old duck, just the same," Jimmy told Bret. "What was that stuff he strung off at first about stars of the morning?" Jimmy frowned boyish disbelief of the old native's psychic power.

"I'll never tell you," Bret returned. "Ask Stan, maybe he got it. I know I didn't."

Green had already leaned forward and touched the Hindoo lightly on the shoulder. "My friend," he said gently, "the *Arana* has been sighted. She will dock at daylight. The Sahib Farley is safe."

The Hindoo turned slow eyes upon the sailor. He nodded his turbaned head several times, and said: "I hear you, Sahib Green. I have seen the Sahib Farley on his way here. Buddha be praised. I shall wait for him at this place. I shall stay all night in this chair."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that. Let me arrange for a room for you here," Stanley said.

"You know not of what you speak." There was a hint of irritation in the old man's reply. "I am old, and in a room alone I should not be safe."

"Oh, yes, you would," Green reassured. "This hotel is——"

"You know not of what you speak," the Hindoo repeated obstinately. "I have not my wallah here to guard me. He knows not where I am to-night. I came upon secret business which only the Sahib Farley may know. My house is always safe for me. I have made it safe, and my wallahs are all strong and brave. The rooms in this hotel are not safe. I might be murdered while I slept. I am old, and must sleep. I should not hear my enemies if they stole in upon me. If I sit here no one will dare molest me."

"I see. Pardon me for a moment." Green leaned across the davenport and said in Spanish. "There's something more than guff tucked under this fellow's turban; something important to Farley, I mean. Why not ask him to

come into our suite to-night? I'm sure he is straight as can be."

"Invite him," nodded the jewel man.

"I can lick him with one finger if he grows obstreperous," Bret assured in an undertone.

The adventurers had found the Spanish tongue most convenient for confidential speaking while in India due to the fact that it seemed to be less easily understood by the Orientals.

"Pick some one your own size," advised Jimmy.

"Yes, I should say so." Green turned a comically rebuking eye upon Bret, who merely snickered. Next instant the sailor had changed his glance to one of kindly courtesy and was addressing the Hindoo.

A gleam of satisfaction appeared in the old man's eyes as he received Stanley's polite invitation.

"You are kind, and your friends are kind, too," he returned almost humbly. "You are all strong, very strong, and I believe you are brave. Yes, I should be safe—safe. If I were to stay to-night in your apartment then the Sahib Farley could come there, to-morrow too. I will stay. You have my permission to show me to your apartment at once." He rose with alacrity from the arm chair. His arms went up to his turban with an odd jerking movement. When he lowered them the three sparklers in his turban had seemingly disappeared.

"What next? Now you see 'em, and now you

don't," Bret mumbled to Jimmy. Bret found it hard to regard the Hindoo as anything other than a joke. "Ask him how he cached 'em—just like that, Green," he said to the sailor in Spanish.

"*Callese* (shut up)," was Stanley's polite response.

"I will walk beside *him*." The adventurers' aged guest pointed a bony forefinger toward Malcolm Edwards. "You may walk at my left side," he grandly informed Stanley.

"Thank you." Green simulated a gravity which he was far from feeling.

"Let us go quickly." The Hindoo had evidently taken command of the situation and his amused hosts were ready to humor him. Green's recent assertion that the East Indian had business of some import to transact with Arthur Farley the others had accepted without question. Green's conjectures always held water.

"Steer for the back elevator," Green advised. In Spanish he added lightly: "His Majesty evidently wants to keep himself shady."

The native elevator boy brightened as he let the group of men into the cage. They were always good for several rupees a trip. The Hindoo peered sharply at the native employee as he sidled into the cage behind Malcolm Edwards, then turned his robed back upon the operator.

"Here we are," Malcolm Edwards an-

nounced cheerfully as he paused before the door of the adventurers' suite, unlocked it and threw it open.

"H-h-h-h-h." The old man skipped nimbly over the threshold with an audible sigh of relief. He made for a chair and plumped himself down upon it. Again his arms went up to his turban. Magically the three great jewels winked out again in scintillating beauty.

"Back again the same night." Bret could not resist a chance to joke. "This time I'll ask him myself how it happened."

"*Callese*," Green warned again. He added seriously: "Cut out the funny business, Bret, or you'll make him sore and he'll do the clam act. I'm trying to get a line on him."

"Sure thing," promised Bret, putting on an owlish expression that almost broke Green up.

"How do you like our quarters?" Green turned to the Hindoo.

"They are well enough." The old man waved an indifferent hand about him. "I see you have already bolted the door. Good; I made no mistake in coming here. Did you notice how I concealed the jewels in my turban?"

"Yes." Green's assent also conveyed inquiry.

The Hindoo understood it as such. He swept his turban from his head and held it up, saying: "See." Inside it, and near the top, he displayed a tiny, flat steel band, joined in the middle, and at both ends. Then he turned the

turban over and laid a finger to one side of the left hand sapphire. Instantly the three jewels were hidden by three folds of the embroidered cloth of the turban, drawn over the jewels by a cunning manipulation of springs in the little steel band. "I do not wear this turban often," the old man continued in his high, piping voice, "but whenever I choose to wear it, I usually conceal the sapphires, I am old; too old to fight against robbers."

"The sapphires in your turban are remarkably fine," Malcolm Edwards said pleasantly. "I have seen a few white sapphires, but never one so large and flawless as the middle stone in your turban. I should judge it must weigh at least twenty carats."

"It is true. The white sapphire weighs twenty carats and the blue, fifteen," came the frank answer. Surprise stamped itself upon the Hindoo's mummy-like features as he spoke. "You understand jewels," he said.

"Yes; it is my business to understand them," Mr. Edwards returned, smiling. "I am a jewel hunter."

"By the grace of Buddha this is strange." The old man hopped up from his chair and came closer to the jewel man. "So was one who came before the Sahib Arthur Farley!"

"You refer to General Wynne Farley, Arthur Farley's grandfather?" questioned the jewel man.

"Yes, yes! What know you of him?" The

Hindoo had now paused, eyes riveted upon Edwards' face.

"We know of him through his grandson, Arthur Farley, who accompanied us to Upper Burma several months ago on a ruby-hunting expedition."

"It *is* the will of Buddha." The Hindoo continued to stare at Malcolm Edwards, at the same time mumbling something to himself which might have been a prayer.

"Did you know General Wynne Farley?" Green now took a part in the conversation.

"Yes, I knew him. He was the friend of one who was my friend." The old man's voice had dropped to a sad, half absent tone.

Green did some quick thinking, then he hazarded a daring guess. "You mean the Rajah of Rhambour, Ashim Dhon?" he questioned in concise fashion.

The Hindoo's eyes darted wildly from Edwards' face to Green's. "What know you of my Rajah, Ashim Dhon?" he piped, almost at a shout.

Ralph could not refrain from putting a crowning touch to the excited Oriental's agitation. "We know he gave the Tempie of Light to General Wynne Farley," he cut in.

"Praise be to Buddha! Now I am sure I am among friends." The Hindoo waved his arms above his head, then threw himself face downward upon the floor and lay motionless for

a moment or two. Above him, the adventurers exchanged significant glances. Green had surmised correctly. Something of importance to Arthur Farley was indeed stirring.

CHAPTER III

A REAL ORIENTAL PUZZLE

THE group of interested jewel hunters waited silently for their strange guest to "come out of it." Soon the Hindoo's turbaned head lifted itself from the floor. Next he raised himself on his hands and got nimbly to his feet. "It is well," he said with a long sigh. "You may know this. I have a letter for the Sahib Arthur Farley. The letter was written by Ashim Dhon to his friend, General Wynne Farley, not long before my Rajah was called to Buddha's realm. But I could never find the general. I searched for him for many years. My Rajah had instructed me to give the letter to the general's son, should I discover that his father had died. I heard no news of the general's death, so I went on with my search for him. At last I learned his son had died, and knew not at that time of *his* son, the Sahib Arthur."

"He and his sister, Margaret, were in England for a number of years. They were educated in England," Green said. He experienced a sudden wave of sympathy for the old man and his weary quest. "It was only last year the Sahib Arthur returned to India."

"Ah-h-h," sighed the Hindoo. "Now I

understand. Still, why could I not find him last year, since he was in India. It is my country, and I know it well." A frown appeared between his irregular white eyebrows. When he had removed his turban the adventurers had noted that his long head was bald save for a few scattered patches of snow white hair.

"Sahib Farley was very busy last year on a search of his own," Malcolm Edwards explained. "He made Calcutta his headquarters, but stayed in the city only a few days at a time. He was continually traveling about the country. After we met him he went with us on a jewel expedition to Upper Burma. It is now almost four months since we returned. His sister sailed for England before we made the journey to Burma. Shortly after our return from Upper Burma he sailed for England, too."

"I understand now; yes, yes, I understand." The Hindoo nodded his head. "I thank you for your fair, open words. Now I am tired and would sleep. I am old, and need sleep. Yes, I need sleep. Have I your permission to lie down on the rug, and rest?" he asked politely.

"Lie down on the rug nothing," Ralph declared sturdily. "You may have my bed, Dand—" He checked himself in time. Jimmy's ridiculous comparison had caught Ralph's fun-loving fancy. To him, the aged Hindoo would never be anything but "Dandelion."

Bret gave an audible snicker which Ralph heard and determined it should earn his pal a

future "walloping." He managed to show a sober face as he said, pointing through the archway to the bedroom beyond: "There's my bed, Sahib—" He paused, then continued with a touch of boyish curiosity. "By what name shall we call you, my friend?"

"You are a magnificent youth." The old man bent an approving gaze upon Ralph which nearly upset both Bret and Jimmy. "You may now hear my name. It is a good name. I am of high lineage. I am Jhenu Khariwara. Once I was the Rajah of Khariwara, but my subjects died like flies of cholera. Then the dacoits laid waste to my province. At the last I went to my friend, Ashim Dhon and became his adviser. You have my permission not to tell me your names to-night. I am sleepy. I should not remember them. To-morrow is another day. The Sahib Arthur will be here." He made a careless gesture of finality, walked over to the archway and through it, and tumbled, turban and all, upon the narrow canopied bed which Ralph had indicated.

"He is a wise guy," Green dared now to smile. "We'd better turn in, too. We'll have to climb out at three-thirty in order to meet the *Arana* at five. It's a long way to the docks, and you know what these Hindoo drivers are. You couldn't hurry one with a bomb."

"Oh, shucks! I wanted to have a little Spanish talk-fest about Dandy," Bret declared. "This Ashim Dhon business has me going."

"Time enough for that, later. The Rajah of Khariwara is a touchy old proposition. If he happened to be awake and heard us gabbling together in Spanish he might get sore. We owe it to our friendship for Farley to treat this old fellow well."

"Yes, Hartson, don't spoil my magnificent reputation," chuckled Ralph. "I owe Jimmy one now for that Dandelion break I almost made."

"Let me know when you're coming after me," challenged Jimmy.

"You'll know." Ralph nodded meaningly at Bret.

"Stanley is level-headed." Mr. Edwards had already begun to take off his shoes and was industriously hunting his bamboo bedroom slippers. "I am going to turn in, pronto. You boys had best do so, too. It's five minutes to eleven. That means a short night's sleep."

"Not half so short as some we've put in, trailing," commented Ralph. "Oh, mamma! I'll be glad to hit the trail again. I'm all fed up with the soft life. Besides it's hot as a furnace here in the city. Hand me a few cool breezes."

Jimmy and Bret sent up a united agreeing murmur.

"The old trail, the out trail; the trail that is ever new," Green quoted the line from Kipling, his own dark eyes full of longing to be on the adventure road once more.

"Say; what are we going to do with Dandelion when we go to meet Farley?" came as a sudden afterthought from Ralph, when, ten minutes later, the comrades went trooping into their sleeping room.

Malcolm Edwards paused in the archway, and considered. His boys waited for him to speak before they entered the room where their guest lay, sleeping.

"I don't know yet," he said slowly. "It's really a question of what he may or may not choose to do. He's an obstinate old fellow. If he should decide to go with us, well and good. If he should balk, then one of us will have to stay here with him."

"*Oh, rats!* We want to welcome Farley in a bunch," was Ralph's impatient protest.

"Well, wait, and see. Don't let it worry you, Son," was his father's placid response. "Now beat it to bed, all of you."

Since the Rajah of Khariwara was occupying Ralph's bed the latter turned in with Stanley Green. It seemed to the Adventure Boys that they had hardly closed their eyes when they heard Malcolm Edwards' low call: "Time, Boys; three-thirty."

The adventurers promptly tumbled out of bed at first call. They were accustomed to responding instantly to their leader's voice. Long experience in trailing in dangerous places had taught them the value of prompt obedience to orders. They made a noiseless exit from the

bedroom to the bath room. The old Oriental slept peacefully on.

"We could leave him sleeping. Probably he wouldn't wake up before we came back," Jimmy suggested. Fifteen minutes later, after a hurried scrub, the adventurers stood in their sitting room, ready to leave for the docks, while their chief made a quick decision regarding what had best be done concerning their odd guest.

Mr. Edwards shook his head at Jimmy's suggestion. "It wouldn't do," he objected. "This old man is accustomed to being well protected by servants. It might give him a bad shock to wake up suddenly and find us gone. Besides, he may have enemies who are seeking his life. It's so often a case of wheels within wheels in this fanatical country. It wouldn't be pleasant to return to our apartment and find he had been murdered. We will have to waken him and ask him what he wishes to do."

Suiting the action to the word, the jewel man stepped into the bedroom and touched the sleeping Oriental lightly on the shoulder. The touch brought the Hindoo up like a jack-in-the-box. He sat blinking at Mr. Edwards for a second, then said: "Where are you going?" His alert old eyes had not missed noting the white helmet on the jewel man's head.

"It is now time for us to leave for the docks where we are to meet the Sahib Arthur Farley. Do you wish to go with us, or shall one of us

stay here with you?" Edwards questioned pleasantly.

"I have no wish to go to the docks. No, I shall not go. You have my permission to remain here with me. You are older, and have more wisdom than your youths. No one would easily question your authority. I believe you are strong, too. I hope you are a good shot."

"I hope I am." Edwards smiled reassuringly at the naïve complacency of the old man. "May I ask you, are you expecting trouble from any special source?"

"Trouble roves the world," was the vague reply. "I am not exempt from it. Now you may pass to the other room, and guard me while your youths are away. Tell them not to dally on the road, especially when they are returning with my young Sahib. Tell them to watch closely their driver. I know this accursed city, and whereof I speak. Now I shall go to sleep again. Let the Sahib Arthur's voice be the one to waken me. Then you will have done well, and will not be sorry."

The Hindoo waved the jewel man an imperious dismissal, dropped back on the pillow and closed his eyes.

Mr. Edwards joined his impatient flock in the outer room, an amused smile on his face. "I am elected to stay here, Boys. Better go on at once. I'll go into details, later. Save your grumbles until you get outside the hotel."

"Uh-h-h-h." Ralph could not repress at

least one groan of disapproval. Then the Adventure Boys went softly on their way down the long hall to the elevator, bottling their regretful remarks until they had won the street outside the hotel.

"I wish this old gump had chased himself around a corner and back home," Jimmy declared half grouchily as the four young men got into one of the hotel taxicabs. "Tell that brownie to step on it, Stan. It's four o'clock now."

"Don't get peeved, James," teased Bret. "You'll never be classed as a magnificent youth if you go on like that."

"Don't want to be one. Let Ralph be it," chuckled Jimmy.

Once the taxicab had started down the wide street, then practically deserted of all but a few other early morning taxis, the four boys began an absorbed discussion concerning the Rajah of Khariwara and his mission to their comrade, Arthur Farley.

"The Rajah has something startling on his mind——" declared Green.

"Besides those three patches of white wool," Bret finished fliply.

"Don't get gay. Learn to respect old age. Take a lesson from my respectful behavior to the Rajah of I'll-never-tell-you-his-name," Ralph told Bret.

"Oh, you boy wonder!" Bret came back with mock enthusiasm. "I never caught you hand-

ing out any respect to your aged friend, Hartson."

"You'll win a thump if you don't mend your conversation," threatened Ralph. "Can the razzberries. Try to be yourself. Seriously, fellows," Ralph's laughing face sobered, "I believe we have stumbled upon something spiffy. Anything with Ashim Dhon in the background can't help but be startling."

"Yes, but it's Farley, not *we*, who's concerned in it," Jimmy reminded him. "We may never hear what it's all about. Old man Dandelion may swear Farley to secrecy before he hands him Ashim Dhon's letter. Then where do we come in?"

"Surest thing ever," Green agreed, "unless Farley should insist that the Rajah must let us in on it, too. That's the way it will be, or else I am mistaken in Farley," he ended with quiet confidence.

"Farley will be all for us," was Ralph's opinion. "I have an idea he has some money, or jewels, some sort of bequest, you know, coming to him from Ashim Dhon."

"Those sapphires in the Rajah's turban are three peaches," Bret said warmly. "We ought to go sapphire hunting some day. Mr. Edwards says the best ones come from Ceylon. We ought to have a try at it sometime before we leave this part of the globe behind us."

"I'd like to have a go at the blueys. Oom Dad says the best sapphires rank with rubies

and diamonds. I'll say I could clean up a nice bunch of money on a few like those the Rajah is sporting in his turban."

"I'd like to ask him where he got them," said Jimmy, "but, believe me, no one could quiz that old Weisenheimer, and get away with it. He is a real Oriental puzzle."

"I can't look at him without wanting to laugh," Bret confessed.

"Yes, and I notice you like to pass your smiles on," Jimmy said accusingly.

Bret having presented the funny side of the situation, the Adventure Boys fell to discussing the Rajah from a humorous standpoint. Meanwhile, the taxicab bowled along with commendable speed toward the docks until the driver came within a little of smashing into a bullock cart which had lumbered into the main thoroughfare from a cross street. It took the taxi man fifteen minutes to tell the bullock cart driver in irate Hindustanee precisely what he thought of him, unmindful of the repeated orders of his fares to "step on it." The native with the bullock cart also had a great deal of sputtered abuse to fling at the taxi man. Green finally saved the day by getting out of the taxicab and leading the gabbling driver back to his cab.

"A few more flivvers like that, and we'll be dished," grumbled Ralph as the taxi finally sped on its way again. "What magic word did

you whisper in that firecracker's ear. He fizzed out all of a sudden."

"I didn't say a word; just took him by the arm and led him gently back to the taxi, but I'll bet his arm aches," Green said grimly.

The ride to the docks went on without further mishap. It was at the last a rough journey over lumpy, uneven ground and through narrow ill-kept streets. At length the smoother approach to the docks was gained. The welcome-home delegation were glad to sight the great harbor of the Ganges River and piled out of the taxicab with relieved alacrity when the machine finally brought them even with the approach to the particular dock at which the *Arana* would presently tie up.

"Here ahead of her, thank goodness," sighed Ralph, his eyes roving eagerly over the expanse of tumbling dark water. The broad estuary showed waves of considerable height in the growing light of the morning sun, the influence of the recent storm farther out at sea. "Try to pick her up, Stan. She must be in sight. Blamed if I can get a line on her, even with the glasses." Ralph had produced a small pair of marine glasses from a pocket and was sweeping the water with them.

"There she blows!" Green's sea-trained eyes had cleverly picked out a steamer which he guessed to be the *Arana* from a number of other boats coming toward the docks. "Those other boats are either tramps, or schooners.

By George, she's a pretty craft! I'll say she held her own in the storm."

It was fully half an hour before the *Arana,* Green had been correct in his guess, steamed up to her dock. As she came nearer, and nearer, the Adventure Boys kept up a bright lookout for Arthur Farley. They were confident he would be close to the rail, watching for them.

"The same good old top!" was Ralph's hearty salutation when, at length, Arthur Farley, laden with luggage, fairly rushed across the gang-plank toward the outstretched hands of his jubilant comrades.

"I'll say I am." Farley's joy of reunion with his friends was no less hearty than the rousing welcome they accorded him. Presently they were swinging up the wide dock together, five abreast, talking animatedly as they walked. The Adventure Boys plied him with eager questions regarding the gale through which the *Arana* had come so sturdily. Farley in turn was equally anxious to learn how his comrades had been, and why Malcolm Edwards had not accompanied them to the wharf to meet him.

"Wait until we get into the taxi, and under way, then you'll hear something that will interest you," promised Jimmy as the quintet of young men neared the place where the taxicab they had hired was awaiting them.

Approaching it, they noted the driver as nowhere in sight.

"What's become of that bird?" Bret's eyes were busy trying to pick up their driver. "If the starter at the Arlington knew that brownie had faded and left his taxi all by its lonesome, Brownie would be hunting another job pronto."

"Get in, fellows. I'll see if I can round up our stray," Ralph volunteered. "There's plenty of room in the taxi for your bags, Farley. They'll be safer inside than out. I'm not crazy about our charioteer. He looks capable of firing them off the car to some waiting pal by the wayside. Then he'd insist that they must have been lost off the machine, somewhere along the road. Of course, I may be misjudging the brownie," Ralph's love of fairness prompted him to add. He motioned Farley to enter the taxicab first.

"I'll play safe." Farley lifted one of his heavy traveling bags into the car ahead of him. About to place it on the floor of the machine he exclaimed in surprise. "What in Sam Hill? It looks as though I'd become suddenly very popular!"

CHAPTER IV

A DANGEROUS GIFT

"WHAT the mischief!" Three heads peered past the Englishman and into the taxi, curious to see what had prompted Farley's quick exclamation. He stepped to one side, pointing to the cab floor.

At first glance the adventurers saw nothing but a huge sheaf of fragrant red roses. It was topped by a white square of pasteboard. Farley seized the card and read out in a wondering tone: "To the Sahib Farley with good wishes for his welfare."

He turned to his friends with: "What do you think of that? I know of only one person who might wish to send me such a welcome. I mean, my sister, Margaret. And she's away off in England. Oh, come now!" A quick conjecture brought the question. "Did she write you fellows to do this?" He was smiling broadly now at the trio beside him. He had failed to note in his complete surprise the amazed expression in his comrades' faces.

"There's a fancy basket under the roses!" Bret called out. He had been first to catch sight of a closely-woven wicker basket of green and gold, almost hidden by the roses.

"By George, so there is!" Farley reached

forward to take hold of the sheaf of roses. He had swung his traveling bag to the pavement again at first sight of the gorgeous mass of flowers.

"Look out!" Green's warning shout stayed Farley's arm midway toward the roses. "Don't touch those roses. Keep well back from the taxi, all of you. Now watch me."

Bret and Jimmy had instantly jumped back from the open door of the machine. Green had scented danger, and they knew it. Farley drew back more slowly, glancing at Green in polite amazement. The sailor had now produced an automatic pistol from an inside coat pocket and was aiming it directly at the wicker basket.

Crack, crack! The two successive shots tore through the basket. It began to rock wildly, dumping the roses off to one side of it. Green fired three more shots. The basket continued to rock with even greater violence.

"Here comes the crowd!" Green made a dash for the taxi's door, slamming it shut. Came the thudding of sandaled feet. A dozen Orientals and two or three white men had collected about the machine in a twinkling. Right behind them came an English policeman.

"What's the row here?" he demanded roughly. He glanced at the automatic in Green's hand, then reached toward the taxi door to open it.

"Better not open that door yet. I just potted a cobra inside. It may not be dead yet. Chase

this crowd. Will you, please? We are Americans who are staying at the Arlington Hotel. We came down to the docks to meet a friend who just came off the *Arana*. We left our driver here with his taxi while we went on down to the dock. When we returned we found him gone. One of our party is looking for him now. In the meantime, some one was kind enough to leave a present in the machine for our friend," Green finished ironically.

"What kind of yarn—" began the officer. He stopped, coloring slightly. Green's steady brown eyes were looking him through, and through, a degree of contempt in their dark depths. "How can I know there's a cobra inside the car, simply by your say-so?" the policeman muttered. "When I hear shots, it's my business to find out what the row's about. What if you've potted a man, instead of a snake? A likely place for a cobra! You guys are all strangers to me."

"You don't know us. I grant you that," Green said patiently, "but you do know that a live cobra's not a safe proposition. Get rid of this crowd, then you may understand the situation a little better. You can see for yourself that we are neither crooks nor hoodlums."

"It's not always crooks and hoodlums who pop men over," the policeman persisted stubbornly. "You've already confessed that you were the fellow who was doing the firing."

"I haven't *confessed* that I fired the shots

you heard." Green laid stress on the word "confessed." "I stated that I fired them. Now dismiss this mob. It will be better for you to do so." Green had suddenly changed his tone to one of authoritative command. It was what Ralph had once laughingly named, "Green's whip-lash tone," and it had rarely failed him on occasion.

"G'wan. G'wan about your business." The officer ordered the three white men, dock laborers. He then directed a gruff flow of Hindustanee to the dozen or more natives who were babbling excitedly among themselves. He continued to shoo them away until the last lingerer had left the spot where the taxi was standing. "Now." He turned belligerently to Green: "Come across with your explanation of this business."

Green's comrades had stood silently by, preferring Green should manage the awkward situation. Arthur Farley half-opened his lips as though to expostulate with the officer, then remained silent. As yet, neither Ralph nor the driver had come into view.

"I am going to make you a proposal," Green said tersely when the crowd had drifted away from the immediate scene. "You and I will drive this taxi up to Station S. I'll drive, and you can sit beside me. When my friend, who is out hunting the driver, returns with the brownie, my friends here," he indicated the mutely attentive trio of adventurers, "will fol-

low us to the station house in another taxi. Lieutenant Bagley at S is a particular friend of ours. We'd prefer to put this matter before him. We are not courting publicity."

"D'you know Bagley?" The officer's gruff tone had modified itself to one of surprise. "I've met him. He's in line now for Chief of Police in Calcutta."

"Glad to hear it," Green returned heartily.

"You see, this looks bad." The officer wagged his head toward the taxicab. "First I hear shots, then I come along and see this cab with the curtains drawn down. Then you slam the door in my face, and hand me that snake story. Does it look good to *you?* It looks pretty rank, I think."

"When we left this taxi to go to the dock the cab curtains were up. I hadn't noticed, until after I closed the door, that they had been pulled down. The person who dumped those flowers and the wicker basket with a cobra in it into the cab must have pulled the curtains down," was Green's calm response.

"A queer deal." Even mention of Lieutenant Bagley's name could not lay the policeman's suspicion. "Why should anybody want to put a cobra—" he began, again scowling his doubt of Green.

"See here, my man," broke in Arthur Farley, his small stock of patience now exhausted. "Do you know Ashby Clegg?"

The officer's eyes widened. "Do you?" he asked, unbelievingly.

"Yes, he's my very good friend. Suppose you walk over with me to his offices. He came off the *Arana* with me. I imagine he may still be at his offices.

"He mentioned to me at the rail that he was going directly to them from the boat. He'll vouch for me, and accept my friend's word without question."

"Oh, you needn't do that." The officer looked his profound respect of Farley, according him the compelling respect of class. "I'll have to 'phone my station for a relief. I'll ask your word not to give me the slip while I'm 'phoning—and, don't monkey with the cab."

"You may trust us. Understand, you may have to wait here with us until our friend returns with the driver. We shall not go on without *him.*"

"All right." The officer eyed Green steadily for an instant, then wheeled and strode off down the dock on his own errand.

"You put that over, Farley." Green gave an audible sigh of relief. "This is a nice mess. I'd like to open the taxi door. I noticed Mr. Cop wasn't very anxious to do it, after I told him about the cobra."

"How did you happen to spot the cob, Stan?" Bret burst out. "Blest if I saw any signs of one in there."

"I saw the roses move a little," Green an-

swered. "There wasn't a breath of wind stirring. I'm suspicious of anonymous givers, anyway. The whole business struck me as fishy. When the time comes to open that wicker basket, you'll find a cob in it, all shot to pieces. See if you won't."

CHAPTER V

ON THE WAY TO STATION S

IF Ralph doesn't heave in sight within the next five minutes, I'll have to leave you and go and look for him. That cop will be back here, pronto. He'll be keen on hitting it up for Station S. He'll be uneasy until he sees Bagley, and learns we are not murderers." Green smiled rather grimly. "What's happened to Oom Bossy Ralph, I wonder?"

As though in answer to his query a shrill whistle suddenly screeched on the morning air. It was Ralph's own pet call, and the worried group turned quick eyes in the direction of the sound. Some distance up the dock they spied two figures coming toward them. One of them was Ralph, the other, the missing driver. Even at that distance they could see Ralph was having his own troubles to bring the native along. He held the driver's arm in a tight grasp as he half marched, half dragged the fellow down the dock.

Ralph was bareheaded now. He had worn a panama hat when he had left them to search for the driver. A nearer view revealed the fact that the collar of his white silk shirt had been half ripped off. His hair was badly rumpled

and a long scratch showed red the length of his left cheek.

Jimmy had sprinted to Ralph's aid the moment he had spied his pal. "Nice little picnic!" he exclaimed, deftly possessing himself of the driver's free, but violently fanning arm.

"Uh-h-h!" Ralph groaned his disgust of his captive. "I've had a lovely time with him. Found him in a tough drinking dive, up the line. He was hob-nobbing with a couple of drunken brownies. They staged a scrap just after I stepped into the place. He got the worst of it, and I had to knock one of the pair down, and haul this flivver out by main force. He's drunk; disgustingly drunk. I wouldn't trust him to drive us back to the hotel. I believe he had been drinking when he started out with us."

"What are you going to do with him?" Jimmy had only time to ask as they forcefully steered their captive up to Bret, Green and Farley.

"I'll never tell you. He can't drive his taxi. That's a cinch. He'll lose his job, if we turn him loose and drive the taxi back to the hotel. Still, he'll lose it, anyway. It's not fair to the hotel management for us to let him get away with such a performance. Blamed if I like the idea of reporting him, though." Ralph frowned his distaste of such a procedure. "This is a fine way to welcome Farley. Eh, Farley?" He grinned cheerfully at the Englishman.

"Don't mention it. It's great to be back with

the Adventure gang again. Things surely have begun to stir." Farley's smile was an equally cheerful duplication of Ralph's.

"Betcha they have. By gracious, I'll either have to let this flopper go, or else rope him. If I decide to rope him, I'll call another taxi and put him in it. I won't inflict him upon you fellows. You could drive this machine back to the Arlington, Green. Or, if I should decide to let him go, I could."

"You mustn't let him go, Ralph," Green warned. "We've been having our own troubles while you were gone. We're bound for Station S when the cop who's on duty here comes up. He'll have to go along."

"We are? Why? What's been doing? Why has the taxi been shut up tight, and all the curtains pulled down?" Ralph fired his questions rapidly at his chums. His eyes had been quick to note the closed taxicab.

Green hurriedly recounted what had occurred during Ralph's absence. He ended with: "This brownie will stand quizzing."

"Turn him over to me, Edwards. I'll soon make him simmer down." Farley took the still-wriggling native by an arm and spun the brown man about as though he had been a top. He brought the wriggler to a sudden standstill, facing himself, at the same time uttering a few stern sentences in Hindustanee.

The will to fight against his captors dropped away from the native like magic. His tensed

muscles relaxed, and he stood still, fear springing into his drink-bleared eyes. He said not a word, merely continued to stare in fear at the Englishman.

"Good work!" Ralph applauded. "What magic words did *you* say to him? He certainly kept me going. I couldn't get a word out of him, though. He kept up the fight, shut-mouth. He had a fuss on the way to the docks with another native. He could talk fast enough then."

"I told him he was going with us to the station house presently." The native understood, and gave a kind of gulping sigh. "He knows good behavior is the only thing that will count in his favor." Farley bent a purposely stern gaze on the fast-sobering driver.

"Who's going to drive the hotel taxi to Station S?" Ralph asked his comrades.

"Green, I guess," Jimmy replied. "Aren't you, Stan?"

"I'll let the cop decide that. We owe him his say-so because he has acted white about this business. If he was a mean cop, we'd be under arrest now. He could have refused to listen to us, and told us, instead, that he could tell our side of the shooting after we got to the police station. He could have hiked us over to his station and made us get in touch with Bagley from there. He's acted upon his own judgment in letting us down easy. I hope it won't bring him a reprimand from his own station."

"Here he comes. He's a good sport. He

isn't trotting another cop along to help manage us," Bret said approvingly.

"You said you'd drive the taxi?" were the officer's first words, directed to Stanley Green. "What's this?" His alert eyes had marked the two additions to the group of young men.

"This is our friend." Green's eyes twinkled as he indicated disheveled Ralph. "He found the driver." He nodded toward the now thoroughly cowed native.

"Humph!" The officer stared hard at the brown man, who hung his head. Then he turned briskly to Green with: "I'll call another taxi for this one and your friends. You can drive the Arlington cab. I'll sit beside you. I'll make blamed sure the window is fastened between us and the tonneau of the cab, too," he wound up with a smile.

"Then you believe my cobra yarn?" A glimmer of triumph flickered in Green's brown eyes.

"Yes. I'm expecting to see what you've said I'd see when we get this taxi up to S. It was a rotten piece of work. Upon my word, *it was!*"

With this the officer hurried away from the adventurers to hail a taxicab that was just emptying itself of a fare. A word, or so, with its driver and the policeman returned, saying: "All right. There's your machine. I know the driver. He knows his business. He'll go ahead. This gentleman and I will follow your cab."

Ralph picked up one of Farley's traveling bags. Bret appropriated the other. Jimmy and Farley followed the two to the taxi the policeman had called, the prisoner walking between them. A new crowd had begun to gather, only to be warned off by the officer.

Meanwhile Green busied himself with an examination of the small square window between the driver's seat and the tonneau of the car. He found it still unfastened. It had been unfastened when they had driven down to the dock. He peered through the small pane of smudged glass, but could see nothing definitely except the roses.

"O.K.," he assured the officer as he stepped into the driver's seat. "How far is it from here to S?"

"About four miles. Hit it up, I've already told the man on the other taxi to step on it." The officer took his place beside Green.

Soon the two taxicabs had won free of the narrow, crooked streets through which the adventurers had driven to the docks and were speeding along upon wider, better-kept streets.

On account of having to drive under the officer's direction Green and his companion were exchanging few personal remarks. In the leading taxi Ralph and his friends were keeping up a lively rattle of Spanish. While Ralph discreetly forebore mentioning names or going into detail regarding the mysterious Rajah of Khariwara who had suddenly arrived at the Arling-

ton, nevertheless, he managed to acquaint Farley with the fact that something "big" was stirring.

"Oh, shucks!" he exclaimed at last in nettled impatience. "I wish this brownie was in Kamptchatka. A hundred to one he doesn't understand Spanish. Still, you can never tell. Gee, Farley! We had a bag of beans to spill before this cab racket started. Now, I've a bushel, and no place to spill 'em. I hope we can wind up this station house business, pronto."

"So do I. You have me guessing," the Englishman responded, with a smiling shake of his head. "I haven't been able to make much of what you are all keyed up about. I'll take your word for it, though, that it's something startling."

"It is," Ralph assured. "Here we are at good old S." He gave a joyful little shout as he beheld the familiar bulk of the station house through an open window.

At the officer's order the two taxis drew up in the street directly in front of S. The officer paid the driver he had hired and dismissed him as soon as his fares had left the machine. Green then drove the other taxi through the station house gateway, and up a short drive situated at the left-hand side of the building. Meanwhile the officer had hustled into the station house. He soon appeared through a side door in front of which the sailor had stopped the car, according to instruction.

With the reappearing officer had come two others from Station S. One of them spoke to Green, instructing him to drive the taxi on into an open garage behind the main building.

The other adventurers had entered the station house by the front door. A loud mingling of cheerful voices from the receiving room revealed the fact that Lieutenant Bagley was within, and glad to see his friends of the ruby trail.

The officer from the dock presently entered the room with another policeman. The pair sat down on a bench, the former's broad face showing patent relief as he noted the friendly terms on which Lieutenant Bagley seemed to be with the adventurers.

"See here, Lieutenant," Arthur Farley began after the group had discussed at friendly length past happenings in which they had figured, "this taxi affair can be kept sub rosa, can't it? We are going on another jewel hunt before long. We'd rather slip away without publicity. I give you my word I haven't an inkling of why such a dastardly trick should have been tried upon me. Possibly it may be a hang-over from the Ruby Temple affair, and Lalla Dhon. One of his dacoits may still be trailing me." Farley made a gesture, conveying his inability to advance a theory other than that. "As it is, the trick fell through, with no one the worse for it. I wish the matter might be dropped."

"It must be investigated; privately, I promise

you." The Lieutenant's lighter expression changed to one of sternness. "Such attempted crimes hark back to the vengeful dacoit element of years ago. We are trying to run down and weed out such conditions. Well, suppose we go out to the garage and take a look at Green's cobra." He rose from his chair, smiling at Green. "I've no doubt but that you spotted one, Green," he declared. "Let's hope it's a dead one by this time."

CHAPTER VI

WHAT THE TAXICAB HELD

THE low-toned murmur of conversation among the adventurers died out as Lieutenant Bagley closed the door of the garage, after having given the officer at the door an instruction to remain outside on duty.

"I'll open the door," Green volunteered. He had armed himself with a long-handled thatch scraper which he had selected from a number of other tools stacked together in a corner of the garage. It was a tool designed particularly for use in raking a ceiling cloth for the purpose of dislodging snakes.

"Better move back further," he cautioned his companions.

The interested watchers obediently moved back a few steps. The sailor's right hand darted to the door knob of the taxi, then back to his weapon as the door came open with a jerk.

"Look." He stepped away from the wide-open door of the taxi, pointing.

The sheaf of gorgeous roses had fallen away from the wicker basket. The basket was now plainly to be seen. It was painted in almost the same shade of green as were the leaves of the roses, of good-size and square. It now stood

on end, the ornamental lid thrown back, the sides torn wherever the bullets had passed through.

"Great guns! A whopper!" Bret called out in triumphant excitement. He was as greatly pleased at Green's clever guess as though he had "sprung" it himself.

The group was now gazing in fascinated repugnance at a mass of black coils, lying, half on a side on which the basket rested, half on the taxicab floor. A sudden spasmodic vibration of the black coils was a signal for a further backing away of the knot of men.

"It's dead," Green assured them. "Of course its tail will keep on moving for a while. I'm going to fish it out of the taxi now."

The watchers left him plenty of room as he deftly caught up the ugly black coils on the scraper and brought the dead cobra out of the machine. He stretched it on the garage floor and whipped out a pocket tape line. "Six feet, four inches," he announced as the result of his quick measurement of the reptile.

"See. One of my bullets caught it in the head. That put the kibosh on Mr. Cobra. He got the others, too." Green indicated the several bullet holes scattered along the big snake's thick muscular length. "He was in tight quarters, and he just had to squirm, and take it."

"You're no end of a clever guy!" broke admiringly from the dock policeman. "You've got brains; you have."

"Much obliged." Green smiled good-humoredly at the officer. "You're wrong, though. I used to work with an animal trapper who handled snakes, too. He taught me a few things about them, particularly to be careful where I stepped, and never to blunder ahead blind when in snake-infested countries. India is in that class, all right enough."

"It's the worst old snake hole in the world," the officer agreed with a gesture of disgust.

Leaving the others to take stock of the dead cobra, Green turned to the taxi and began a careful examination of the tonneau of the taxicab. He had no expectation of finding a second cobra. The wicker basket could not have contained another serpent of even moderate size. He was not certain, however, that he might not find that particular venomous pest of India, "little karait," a tiny variety of snake, but as deadly of sting as a cobra.

The white rays of his small, but powerful pocket light, when trained upon every inch of the interior of the taxi, revealed none such reptile. He discovered nothing else in the tonneau of a dangerous nature. A few green leaves and crimson rose petals lay scattered on the cab floor.

Green swung round from his scrutiny of the cab with a cheerful: "Nothing stirring."

"Just the same, I'm not crazy to ride back to the Arlington in that snake den," Bret ob-

jected. Bret had never yet conquered his city-born repugnance for snakes.

"Oh, cheesecake! This poison-pack wasn't a ringhals." Jimmy poked the dead cobra lightly with the toe of one shoe. He referred to the black, white-ringed African cobra which can spray its venom for a distance of several feet. "Very likely it stung itself when Green pinged it."

"You aren't going to ride to the Arlington in this cab," Lieutenant Bagley informed them. "I wish you would use my machine. I must keep this one here for a time, at least. I'll send a plain clothes man to the Arlington to see the manager privately, and put him wise, regarding this affair. It will be necessary for him to come over here and identify this native as one of the hotel's taxi drivers. I'll lock up this brownie after I have quizzed him. I'll need you gentlemen here while I am questioning him."

"How about putting the cobra into the basket again?" Green was now examining the wicker basket. The catch which had secured the lid of the basket had been partially torn off by the cobra's frenzied struggles.

"I was going to ask you to do so," the Lieutenant said appreciatively. "I'll arrange to have one of my men bring in the roses and the basket while I'm quizzing the fellow. Then, please notice, all of you, how he behaves. We'll be better able to judge him by his manner at

that moment than by anything I can get out of him by questioning."

Green gave the sheaf of fragrant roses a last vigorous shake by way of precaution, then handed them to Farley. "May I present you with a few posies?" he bowed.

"Yes; since you're sure they won't bite me." Farley's lips were touched by a faint smile. "Some one had it in for *me*. *That's flat.*"

The sailor next turned his attention to the dead cobra. He caught up the ugly black reptile on the handle of the scraper and flipped it deftly into the opened basket. It dropped into coils, its head on top of the black mass, presenting a disquieting effect of being still alive.

"Remain here on duty, Sherwood," Lieutenant Bagley told the officer stationed at the garage door. "See that no one except our men enter the garage."

"All right, Lieutenant," replied the man.

Returned to the receiving room Lieutenant Bagley conducted the adventurers through it and into his private office at one side of the long room. When he had seated his visitors he sat down at his desk, briskly pressing an electric button that would summon an officer with the prisoner.

Brought before the lieutenant, the native appeared vastly nearer sobriety and decidedly anxious. He glanced apprehensively from one face to another with no sign of his former bel-

ligerance. The official began questioning him in Hindustanee, the adventurers listening sharply to his replies. Ralph, Bret and Jimmy could understand but little of either questions or replies. Farley and Green, however, missed nothing, thanks to their knowledge of the language.

"Why did you bring me here?" he asked over and over again in his native tongue. "I have done nothing to be brought here for. It was for that one," he pointed to the dock policeman, whose name was Murdock, "to arrest me if he saw me doing wrong. It was not for him," he sourly indicated Ralph, "to drag me to my cab and hold me there. I was ready to come back to my cab when he came after me."

"Yes, you were," Ralph's tone bespoke his doubt of such a possibility. "You'd never have got back to it the same day. You were too busy fighting." Ralph spoke in English, but the Hindoo evidently understood him.

"You know nothing about it," he retorted, scowling.

"That's a favorite slam of these brownies," Ralph said, laughing. "Pardon me for butting in, Lieutenant."

"Go as far as you like," the official said amiably. "Would you like to ask him any questions?" he turned to the dock policeman.

"No." Murdock shook his head. "I don't believe he is *it*. This business has me going. I've been looking this fellow over. I remember

now, I passed him, going up the dock, before the *Arana* tied up."

Beyond exchanging a few words with Lieutenant Bagley and his duty staff, Officer Murdock had had little to say. He had watched Stanley Green open the taxicab door and remove the big cobra in stolid silence. Only then had his wondering approval of Stanley's level-headed tactics broken forth.

A little further questioning on the Lieutenant's part brought nothing of moment to connect the driver with the cobra episode. Suddenly the official pressed another button on his desk. The occupants of the office waited tensely for the next scene in the little drama.

CHAPTER VII

TRYING TO GET A LINE ON THE RAJAH

EVERY pair of eyes was bent speculatively upon the brown man as the door of the office opened to admit an officer, carrying the bunch of red roses. Directly behind him came a second policeman with the wicker basket. The lid was fastened now and its square decorative outlines gave no hint of its ugly contents.

Across the Hindoo's face an expression of curious surprise had flashed at first sight of the flowers and the basket. He stared from one to the other of the two objects with an air of puzzlement which seemed genuine.

"Have you seen these roses and this basket to-day, before now?" Lieutenant Bagley put crisply to the Hindoo.

"No, Sahib Lieutenant." The fellow shook a slow, puzzled head.

"Very sure you haven't?"

"No, Sahib Lieutenant, I have not seen them before now," came the respectfully positive answer.

"Do you know what is in that basket?" The lieutenant tried a new tack.

"How can I know what is in the basket, Sahib Lieutenant, when I never saw it before?" the brown man reproachfully reminded.

"Open it," came the officer's crisp command. The policeman who had brought the basket into the office had placed it upon a smaller, flat-topped desk at the left of Lieutenant Bagley's desk.

The Hindoo stepped unhesitatingly up to the table and fingered the fastening of the basket. He raised the lid, then gave a loud, terrified shout. In his fright he backed stumblingly away from the table, bumped forcibly against Bret's chair and sat down on Bret's knees.

"Good night!" Bret braced his hands against the native's shoulders, raising him to his feet. The brown man balanced uncertainly for an instant, then stood still, his eyes glued to the basket and its fearsome contents.

"Ha-a-a-a-a!" He gave a gulping sigh, then drew closer to the table on which the basket stood. "It is dead," he said in Hindustanee, addressing the relieved words to the Lieutenant. "I thought when I opened the basket it was alive."

"If it had been alive, I wouldn't have asked you to open the basket, my man," was the officer's crisp response. "You weren't brought to Station S to be murdered. Our business here is to prevent murders, not commit them."

Listening darkly to the lieutenant, the frown between the Hindoo's black brows deepened. He suddenly directed an angry torrent of Hindustanee at the officer which rose louder as he continued to talk. A sweet temper was not one

of the bewildered driver's virtues. Twice before, that day, he had demonstrated the lamentable fact. He forgot where he was, and angrily sputtered forth his injured feelings.

"If he is a bluff, he's certainly a good one," Ralph murmured to Green. "He's giving a wonderful imitation of a man with a sore head."

"I hardly believe he's mixed up in this cobra business. Still——" Green shrugged his shoulders. "I've heard these natives rave more than once before. Start 'em off, and they can almost prove black is white."

"Stop your noise." The lieutenant was obliged to raise his voice to a stern shout in order to prevail above the Hindoo's indignant rattle of words. "Listen to me."

The threateningly sharp rebuke he delivered to the brown man had its effect upon the fellow. He came to a muttering stop, then broke out again with the wrathful question: "What has this snake in the basket to do with me?"

"You are going to know that, right now. If it has nothing to do with you, and you've had nothing to do with putting the basket where it was found, then you'll be lucky."

"I know nothing about it." The Hindoo's arms went up in a wild gesture of protest. "I hate snakes. I would not touch one for a thousand rupees."

"All right. Keep quiet, and let me do the talking." The officer's voice warned the prisoner to sulky obedience of the command. He

listened to the lieutenant's stern explanation of why he had been arrested, looking thoroughly scared.

"I know nothing about it," he kept reiterating miserably as he continued to answer the searching questions put to him. "Nothing; nothing at all."

"I doubt if he is guilty of complicity in this affair," was the Lieutenant's verdict, spoken in English to the others. "He claims he started up the dock before you were half way across the shorter wharf where the *Arana* was expected to tie up. He said he thought he would not be away from his cab more than ten or fifteen minutes; that he'd often let his cab stand while he went for a drink, and nothing bad had ever before happened. He says he looked back toward it three or four times, and saw no one near it."

"He's by no means stupid. He made one good point when he said that no one but a snake charmer would put that size cobra in a basket and not be bitten by it," Arthur Farley declared with conviction.

"He's right about it, too; no one but a snake charmer, or a snake trapper," Green amended. "I only caught a little of that choice bit of wisdom. He said something else, though, when he said that the fellow who wanted the cobra to bite you wouldn't have picked *him* out to help the trick along. That's true. He's no more than an unreliable sputterheels."

"I am not a bad man," interrupted the prisoner anxiously. He had caught the drift of the conversation and was quick to plead his own cause. "Please let me go, Sahib Lieutenant. I shall have trouble enough without being put in jail. When the Sahib there," he pointed to Green, "drives my cab back to the hotel there will be no more work for me. I need work. I must support both my father and mother, who are old."

"You'd better brace up, then, and cut out drinking," was the lieutenant's dry advice. "I am going to lock you up until I find out more about you. You'll get a square deal. Don't worry about that part of it. Behave well, and you may not have to stay locked up very long."

The Hindoo recognized finality in the "Sahib" Lieutenant's tone and words. The natural stoicism of the Oriental, which had temporarily deserted the brown man, returned to him. He gave a kind of despairing gurgle, then resigned himself to his misfortune. The two officers who had brought the wicker basket and the roses to the lieutenant returned to the room at a touch of their chief's desk button and led the prisoner away.

"I'll have this fellow looked up," the lieutenant assured his visitors. "He says his name is Badhur Khow. I'll also send one of our best native 'tecs' around among the snake charmers. There are a lot of them here in the city, mostly performing on the plazas. It's possible I may

pick up a clew. I'd advise you to watch yourself, Mr. Farley. Some one's out to put you under the ground; some one who has been keeping close track of you and your friends here. It looks as though it might be the same dacoit element that Lalla Dhon headed for so long."

"His followers in Upper Burma may believe him dead by this time, and that we finished him," Ralph suggested. "Some one may believe that Lalla Dhon got the Ruby Temple away from Ganga Singh and that we killed the Robber Rajah and took the Temple from his person after he was dead."

"I believe, too, that Dhon's men may have it in for me," Farley said. "Well, I'll do my best at following your advice, Lieutenant."

"And I'll do my best to run this affair down," promised the officer heartily. "You'll hear from me within a couple of days. I'll make an appointment with you at the Arlington. I'm anxious to see your father, Mr. Edwards. He is a man worth knowing."

"He beats the world, I think." Ralph beamed his ingenuous pleasure at the compliment to his father.

"I'll ask you as a special favor to me, Murdock, to keep a lynx eye on matters on your beat at the dock," Lieutenant Bagley turned to the dock policeman. "You may run across some one down there who saw the fellow who put the basket and the roses in the taxi, either

at the time he did it, or while he was on the way there."

"I'll look alive, sir," Murdock made quick assurance. "I'm ready to beg your pardon, gentlemen, for the stand I took about this business. I had to do it, you understand." He addressed the adventurers collectively.

"All in the line of duty, Officer Murdock."

Green's smile warmed the policeman's heart. From the moment the adventurers had greeted Lieutenant Bagley he had felt abashed at his part in the matter.

Ralph gave a long audible sigh of satisfaction when, a few moments later, the five comrades settled themselves in the lieutenant's car for the drive to the Arlington.

"Oh, Jiminy Christmas!" Bret exploded, the instant the roadster left the station yard behind. "I thought we were never going to have a chance for a private chin-chin. We've a lot to tell you, Farley."

"I believe it. You've thrown out enough mysterious remarks to keep me guessing," laughed Farley. "Go ahead now. Shoot it at me."

"You go ahead and tell him, Green. You're our best story-teller," Ralph declared with an impish grin.

"I like your nerve," Green grinned responsively. "Now just what did you mean by that?"

"Oh, cheese it. Get down to brass tacks. Don't be sensitive."

"I'll try to buck up, and not feel hurt. Here goes."

In his usual terse manner Green informed the Englishman of the arrival of the Rajah of Khariwara and his inquiry for Arthur Farley.

"You've surely handed me a knock-out," was Farley's amazed reception of Green's recital. "And he claims to be a friend of Ashim Dhon? He must be an old-timer."

"He's nearing the century mark—provided he hasn't already passed it," replied Green. "You know how long-lived some of these East Indians are. He's agile, though. He can move like a flash when he feels like moving. He's an odd proposition. I don't know——" Green paused, frowning.

His pause was a signal for Jimmy, Bret and Ralph to break out into concerted exclamation. Each had guessed Green's unspoken suspicion, and shared it.

"Maybe we are lodging another kind of snake at the hotel!" Ralph exclaimed. "Suppose old Dandelion is a poisonous bluff. We haven't a thing but his word to prove to us that he is the man he says he is. He claims he has a letter for you from Ashim Dhon. He might have, at least, shown us the envelope it was in. Ashim Dhon must certainly have addressed it to General Wynne Farley. But this old fellow didn't come across with it."

"He knew enough to come to us to inquire about you," Bret put in. "It's hard to say how much more he knew."

"Yes; how did it happen that he came to the hotel hunting you on the very night we expected the *Arana* might come in?" asked Jimmy.

"I've thought of all that, too," declared Green. "According to his dress, and his talk, he has plenty of money. He says he has servants. He claims the title of rajah. Such nabobs can put over most any old thing and get away with it."

"Not with this crowd," Farley said positively. "If this old fellow is an enemy of mine, he has still something to learn. I'll say you know what it is." His confident gaze traveled from one face to another of his friends.

"Betcha we know," Ralph wagged his head.

"There's one thing in his favor. He couldn't possibly have known sooner than we when the *Arana* might come in, unless"—Green made an emphatic little stop—"he had had Farley dogged in England by a spy of his who came across on the *Arana*, too. In such an event the spy might have sent Dandelion a wireless. He may have received it before he came to the hotel."

"Well, didn't he shut his eyes and pretend to go into a trance?" Jimmy reminded half scornfully. "When he came out of it he said the *Arana* was safe, and would be in soon. Betcha

he knew by wireless, then. You can't make me believe in such bunk."

"His spy couldn't have sent him a wireless while the storm was raging," Farley said. "The operators were too busy trying to pick up help. The captain was afraid the waves would smash her. I never before saw such a sea. I hope never again to sail such another, even half as wild. After we played safe I tried to send your father a wireless, but was told the apparatus was out of commission. I didn't make a point of insisting upon having a message sent because I knew we were going to dock before long and thought you'd probably meet the boat. It's possible that, if I had offered to make it worth while to one of the operators to get a message through for me, he might have changed his tune. That's what a spy, if there were a spy, of this old fellow's might have done."

"It's all supposition of course, but——"

"Suspicious supposition, though," Ralph interrupted Green. "Who would be likely to know more about Ashim Dhon than one of Lalla Dhon's pals?"

"How do we know but that this old gink was the patriarch robber of Lalla Dhon's gang?" was Bret's theory.

"We can't know yet, but we are going to know soon." The sailor's face set in determined lines. "One thing's certain. If he arranged this cobra business, he did it before he

came to the hotel. He wasn't out of our sight afterward. He couldn't have made a move from Ralph's bed without one, if not all of us, having heard him. We are too thoroughly used to night watching to be caught napping."

"We may find when we are back in the apartment that he has vamoosed," Bret suggested.

"I don't believe Oom Dad would let him go. If he tried anything like that Dad would be suspicious of him. We can't judge a thing about him till after he meets Farley, and talks with him," was Ralph's wise opinion. "I hope Dandelion will turn out O.K. He's such a funny old card."

"If he should come across with a letter from Ashim Dhon to your grandfather, Farley, make up your mind it will be worth reading," Green said with conviction. "According to what we've heard about Ashim Dhon he was as fine principled a man as his son, Lalla Dhon, was worthless."

CHAPTER VIII

THE MESSAGE OF ASHIM DHON

"WHERE'S Dandelion?" was Ralph's first low-voiced inquiry after the warmly-exchanged greeting between Arthur Farley and Malcolm Edwards was over. "He's still here, isn't he?"

"Yes; he's in there, asleep." The jewel man motioned with his head toward the inner room. "He's a good sleeper."

"I'm crazy to have a look at him," Farley told Mr. Edwards. "The boys put me in touch with the situation on the way here," he added in guarded Spanish.

"I knew they would. I've been expecting you since eight-thirty. The *Arana* docked late, of course. It's now after twelve. You are in good time for luncheon, Farley."

"The *Arana* docked on time. It's we who are late." Farley gave a short laugh. "We bumped into adventure. It began at the dock and ended at Station S."

"Station S?" Edwards' dark brows lifted in surprise.

"Suppose you go downstairs with me while I register and have my luggage placed in my suite," was the Englishman's significant suggestion. "I had my suite reserved for me while

I was away, you know. We will come back here, directly I've registered. In the meantime——"

The jewel man nodded understanding. The two men left the apartment, closing the door very softly behind them, so as not to disturb the sleeper.

Meanwhile the Rajah of Khariwara, remained, seemingly, locked in a sleep too deep to be broken by the subdued voices of the adventurers as they continued to talk together in the outer room. Presently the jewel man and Arthur Farley returned to the apartment, there to hear from Ralph that "Dandy" was "still pounding his ear."

"Some fine business, Oom Dad. What?" Ralph was all eagerness to hear his father's opinion of the cobra incident.

"It was a fiendish piece of work," Edwards' pleasant features became strangely grave. "I have been favorably impressed by this old man. I had rather believe him innocent than guilty. He strikes me as being honorably-minded. If he is an enemy, he is a daring one—a master criminal. No one except a master criminal would venture, as he has, into the intimate presence of one he was trying to destroy. That's all for now. More later. Now that Farley has arrived, I think we had better waken the Rajah. Keep your eyes and ears open, but don't say much. Let him and Farley do most of the talking. Farley knows his India better than we know it."

Malcolm Edwards had answered Ralph's question rapidly, and in Spanish. With a last cautioning uplift of a finger he walked into the inner room and over to the bed where the Rajah lay. The old Hindoo's eyes were open. He gazed calmly up at the jewel man, and said: "Is it time?"

"Mr. Farley is here. Shall I ask him to come to you, or will you join us in the other room?" Edwards said courteously.

"Yes; I know he is here. I was awake when he arrived. I have the manners of a Rajah. I waited for you to announce his arrival. I will go with you to meet him. You will kindly introduce me to him by my name, and title—Jhenu Khariwara, Rajah of Khariwara."

"It shall be as you wish," Edwards assured, secretly amused by the old man's grandiose manner.

Jhenu Khariwara popped up from the bed with the curious agility of movement which the adventurers had earlier noted. "You have my permission to walk first, and announce me," he directed.

Mr. Edwards complied, inwardly hoping that the announcement might not raise a too-ready snicker from any member of his flock. Farley and Green could be depended upon for becoming gravity. Jimmy, Bret and Ralph were likely to laugh.

As they entered the sitting room and the jewel man began the introduction of the two men,

strangely met, the Adventure Boys rose from their chairs in deference to old age, rather than title. Arthur Farley stepped forward to meet the aged Oriental with outstretched hand, and none of the fun-loving trio felt like laughing to hear the Rajah say quaveringly: "Son of my friend's friend, praise be to Buddha, I have found you at last."

Arthur Farley seated the Rajah with every appearance of courteous respect, then drew up a chair at the Hindoo's left.

"Would you not prefer us to leave you for a while to yourselves?" the jewel man asked the two.

"What is your pleasure in the matter, Rajah?" Farley turned to the Oriental.

"Your friends are welcome to hear my words to you. I believe they are my friends, too." The turbaned head made dignified inclination to the pleased adventurers.

"I intended to ask you if they might not include your confidence." Farley smiled relief at his secretly jubilant comrades.

"We shall respect your confidence, Rajah," Mr. Edwards promised.

"I thank you for your incomparable excellence," was the serious response.

The jewel man bowed without daring to glance at his companions. He knew the flowery compliment to himself could not fail to be humorous to them. A single glance at one of them might provoke a round of chuckles. The Rajah's

next remark, however. routed the inclination toward mirth.

"Are you absolutely certain that nothing which goes on in this apartment can be heard from outside?" There was a business-like ring to the Hindoo's high-piped question.

"Yes. We learned that for our own interests a long time back," Malcolm Edwards replied.

"It is well. I will now give you the letter from my Rajah, Ashim Dhon, which I have preserved for many years, first for your grandfather, then for your father, and at the last for you, as the grandson of General Wynne Farley. I have read this letter, because I helped my Rajah write it, when he had grown very feeble from a weak heart. The letter is now yours, Buddha be thanked."

With this little preamble the Rajah of Khariwara drew from an inside pocket of his linen robe a long envelope, once white, now yellowed by time. He proffered it to Arthur Farley.

The Englishman accepted the envelope, his strong features betraying the wondering emotion he was feeling over this long-delayed message from his grandfather's noble friend.

"I will share my letter with you." Farley's gray eyes looked loyal affection at his comrades. He tore open an end of the long envelope and drew forth from it several triple-folded sheets of closely-written white paper. Something slipped from the folds of the letter and dropped upon the matting rug. It lay in a radiant, glit-

tering heap against the dark green of the rug. A low burst of exclamation rose from the adventurers.

"What's this?" The Englishman stooped and gathered the little radiant heap into one hand. "A bracelet! And it's a hummer!" He held up the bracelet for his friends to see, his face glowing.

The Rajah watched Arthur Farley, a pleased light in his small eyes. "The hands of my Rajah put together the bracelet," he said proudly. "He wished the Sahib General to have something he had designed and made for the sake of friendship. My Rajah could work well in gold and silver and jewels. I tell you this because he wrote it not in the letter. Now you have my permission to read the letter." He looked expectantly at Farley.

"I will read it. Before I read it may I ask you a question? Are the jewels in this bracelet diamonds, or white sapphires?"

"They are white sapphires. I shall tell you nothing more. You will understand all when you have read the letter." The Hindoo's tone became insistent.

Malcolm Edwards had exchanged nods with Ralph when the Rajah had answered Farley. Long experience with jewels in general had caused them to decide as Farley held up the bracelet that the stones were white sapphires.

The Englishman handed the bracelet to Malcolm Edwards for a closer inspection and began

unfolding the letter. It was written upon rather long sheets of thin paper, also yellow with age.

"To my beloved and respected friend, General Wynne Farley," the young man read out to the tense group of listeners. "It is long years since you fought the dacoits at my side and freed my province of these snakes. I thought, then, I should still see you often at my palace. But we have met only twice since that time, and the years have sped fast.

"I wonder if you still live, for I have gathered no news of you save that you had departed to Upper Burma. I was distressed when I learned this news. The worst element among the dacoits finds a hiding place in the hills of Upper Burma. You know, my friend, that I have the sorrow of an outlaw son. Lalla leads a band of murderous fellows like himself somewhere in those very hills. I would that I knew what has become of my older son, Gulo, whom I drove from my presence with harsh words because of treachery to me. I believed he robbed my treasury. A little while after he went away I discovered it had been Lalla, and not Gulo, who had robbed me. But it was too late, then. Gulo had left the palace, and never have I been able to trace him.

"So, I have grown old, and have eaten my heart out with trying to find those whom I have loved and lost—yourself and my son Gulo. I daily implore Buddha to preserve you so that you may receive my letter. Soon I shall have

passed to the blessed realm of my Lord, Buddha. Before the time of my departure arrives I wish to transfer to you my dearest possession. It is a rock-bound island far to the south of Ceylon, and is uncharted and unnamed so far as the navigation lists are concerned. It is a small island, hardly more than ten miles across in the widest part. It has belonged to the Rajah of the house of Rhambour for many generations.

"On this island I have spent my happiest days, alone, save for my faithful friend Jhenu and a few trustworthy servants. When sorrow over the loss of my sons weighed heavily upon me, it was upon this island I found peace and occupation for my burdened mind. I should like to write more fully to you concerning this island. It has a name which one of my ancestors gave it. It would not be wise, however, to write fully of it for fear the letter might fall into greedy hands. Jhenu will guard it with his life, but I have an enemy who would gladly murder him if he should suspect that Jhenu had such a letter in his possession.

"Jhenu knows all that which I may not write you. He will tell you all. I have also intrusted to him a deed of the island, signed and sealed by myself and also a legal writing which provides, that, in the event of your death, before this letter is delivered to you, my legacy to you shall revert to your son, and, in the event that your son shall have died, meanwhile, the legacy will then revert to his son, who is your grand-

son, in the event that such an one shall have been born to the house of Farley. Should Jhenu learn that you, your son, or your grandson are no more, then he shall destroy these writings and my island shall belong to no one by my giving. I pray that my enemy may never find it.

"If you should receive this letter soon and learn from Jhenu that I am still alive, come to me quickly, and without fail. I know you will do so. I am trusting to Jhenu a token which you gave me when we fought against the dacoits, side by side. It will prove to you that it is I who write, and thus establish Jhenu's integrity. Farewell, my friend, with whom I swore the bond of brotherhood in the heyday of our manhood. May we meet again in India, the country we have both loved.

"Faithfully thy Brother,
"Ashim Dhon, Rajah of Rhambour."

An impressive hush followed Farley's reading of the Rajah of Rhambour's letter. The innate nobility of Ashim Dhon, his loyalty to his friends, his frankly acknowledged mistake, which had cost him his favorite son, had impressed deeply the sympathetic side of the carefree Adventure Boys' natures.

"It's a queer old world." It was Stanley Green who lifted the silence. "If only Gulo might have known before he died that his father

knew the truth about him." The sailor spoke half to himself.

"What know you of Gulo? How know you that he died?" The old Hindoo's voice rose high with agitation.

"We knew him. We know he died, and where he was buried. We know, too, that Lalla Dhon is dead——"

"Thanks be to Buddha for having removed him to his just punishment," interrupted the Rajah excitedly. "Know you also how *he* died, and where he lies buried? Would that the tiger had gnawed his treacherous bones."

"Lalla Dhon got all that was coming to him." Ralph was glad of an opportunity to break up the somber effect of Ashim Dhon's letter to General Farley.

"Tell me all," cried the Hindoo.

"You tell him, Stan," he added rapidly in Spanish. "We can wait for what he has to tell us. How about it, Farley? Oh, shucks! I beg your pardon, Oom Arthur. This is your inning." Ralph looked slightly abashed. "It's your right to hear first the rest of Ashim Dhon's message."

"Oh, never mind that. I had rather Green told him about the Dhons," Farley assured in Spanish. "Break it gently to him, Stan. It's a confoundedly unpleasant story. Have a heart for his age."

"Won't you tell him, Mr. Edwards?" Green never forgot deference to the jewel man.

"No, Stanley. I had rather you would tell him. He seems to have a preference for you above the rest of us," smiled Malcolm Edwards.

The story of Ashim Dhon's sons has already been set down in "The Adventure Boys and the Ruby Temple." Green related it briefly to the attentive listener. The Rajah absorbed it eagerly, sitting far forward upon the edge of his chair, lean hands clasped tightly together, his black, bird-like eyes never leaving Green's face.

"It is well my Rajah lived not long enough to learn the truth of how his sons died," he said quietly at the close of Green's narration. "Always, when but a boy, Lalla coveted the Ruby Temple. The gift of the temple to the Sahib General was made secretly. Still, in some dark way, Lalla must have learned of it. What Buddha wills, must come to pass. It was intended, Sahib Arthur, that the temple should return again into the hands of the house of Farley. It was to be. It was to be." The old man nodded sagely over the repeated, fatalistic words.

The adventurers were keenly approving of the Rajah's splendid spirit. Aged as he was, there lived within him the soul of a strong man. He relapsed into momentary reverie, then he raised his head with oddly jerky energy.

"The past is dead. Who can recall it? Let us speak of the future. What you have done in the name of my Rajah binds us together as

brothers. I am satisfied the Sahib Farley sits among true friends. He wishes you to hear my message. I wish you to hear it. You have my permission to be silent while I speak." The Rajah made an autocratic little gesture.

This time the newly-declared brothers of the Oriental had no inclination toward laughter. They waited with tense expectation for what was to come. Secretly, in the mind of each, was the conviction that the Hindoo was in no way concerned with the cobra incident of the morning. They no longer doubted his integrity.

"Many generations ago," began the Hindoo briskly, "an ancestor of my Rajah discovered a little island, in the Indian Ocean, far south of Ceylon. He was the captain and the pilot of his own ship. He saw the island from afar and thought it nothing but a formation of huge rocks. Then a storm came, and drove his ship upon these rocks. Buddha favored him, for he was a good man. His ship was damaged, but sank not. He was alone, save for his divers, who were also his crew. He had gone to sea to seek pearls. He and his men climbed the high rocks to see what they might. From the heights they saw far below them a green jungle. They were glad for they needed water to drink, and wood with which to repair the ship.

"After a while they found a way down the rocks to the jungle. The jungle seemed fairly large to them from the rocks, but they could not see far across it. It was raining when they

climbed the rocks. Afterward, when the sun came out again, they saw clearly and found the island to be entirely girded about by high rocks. They judged the island to be about ten miles long and five or six miles wide.

"They found an abundance of water, and some small game of the grass-eating variety. They encountered no cobras or other poisonous snakes, and were surprised to find no pestiferous insects. The trees were not very tall on the island, but they were large enough to furnish the needed wood with which to repair their disabled ship. They stayed on the island over three months. While the servants of my Rajah's ancestor, Rhada Dhon, worked at repairing the ship, my Rajah amused himself with exploring the island. He was a man who felt no fear, and preferred his own company to that of his men. They were as children to him for he was a man of good mind. His divers were honest fellows who could be trusted, and needed no watching.

"In time he won across the island and saw that the rocks on the west side were far higher than those on the east side upon which the ship had so nearly been wrecked. They were steep and jagged and he found he could not possibly climb up them. The highest of them all had a peaked top like that of a temple. When he had come to the base of the peaked top he found a split on the rocks at one side of the peak which was like a doorway. He could stand erect in it, but beyond the opening it was dark. He made

himself a torch and then walked into the dark opening. He soon discovered that it was a natural passage in the rock which went along for a little way and then appeared to open into light again. As he came nearer the light he saw that it was the light of day and that the passage opened at both ends. He decided to go through it, expecting to see the ocean, directly in front of him. Instead, he saw a gravel plain, walled in on all four sides by high rocks.

"He stepped out upon the plain and walked across it toward the rocky side opposite the gap through which he had come. There, the rocks were also too steep for him to climb without the aid of ropes. He thought he heard the wash of waves and believed the ocean lay on the other side of the rocky wall. He decided he had reached the west end of the island. There was nothing specially interesting to him about the gravel plain so he turned back to return to the ship. He was half way across the plain when he saw a small white shining stone among the gravel stones. He picked it up, thinking he had found a diamond. He began hunting to see if he could find more diamonds. He found several fair-sized blue sapphires but no more diamonds.

"He went back to the ship, but kept his secret. Before his men had completed the repair of the ship he had been to the gravel plain six times. Each time he found sapphires, and a few of the white stones. They were sapphires, too, but he

did not then know it. He filled a little skin bag with the stones and hung it about his neck under his clothing.

"As soon as the ship was repaired the divers began hunting for a channel deep enough for her to pass through, and safely out to sea. Before the ship weighed anchor he made one more visit to the gravel plain. There, he carved his name and claim to the island on a tree, growing between two rocks. When he was ready to return to the ship he filled the gap with the largest stones he could carry. He knew he could find the gap again because of its nearness to the high peaked rock, but he hoped no one else would ever find it. He intended to return to the plain, later, with his three sons to gather its wealth of jewels.

"Before he left the island he made a small chart of it, computed its latitude and longitude, and marked the course and depth of the channel his men had found.

"He never returned to the island with his sons as he had hoped to do. One of them died of cholera and the youngest son was killed in a fight against dacoits. The Rajah Rhada had so much trouble with the dacoits he dared not again leave his province long enough to go back to the island. He learned that the white stones were sapphires and he named his island claim 'The Island of Sapphires.'

"Before he died, he swore his only remaining son to secrecy and then gave him the chart and

a writing he had composed, describing the plain and giving necessary directions for finding it. His son had no taste for such an adventure, being a scholar and a bookworm. He left the chart and the writing to *his* son when he died. Thus it was that my Rajah's forbears each received the knowledge of the Island of Sapphires, but for one reason, or another, never visited it. At last the chart and writing fell to my Rajah. He was a young man, just home from Oxford, the English college, when his father died. I had been to Lhouva Dhon, his father, as a confidential secretary, and my Rajah turned to me for advice.

"We were of the same mind, to go to the Island of Sapphires. We made ready a secret expedition, and went. We took with us only enough trusted seamen to sail our ship, and a few divers. Even these men knew nothing of our true object in going to the island. They were told the voyage was for the hunting of pearls. Rhada Dhon's men had found plenty of pearls while diving to find a channel for their ship. My Rajah promised his men half of the pearls they might find in the waters on the east side of the island. When we finally reached the island without mishap they were kept occupied and happy with their pearl fishing and thought nothing of it when my Rajah and I went inland to explore the island.

"We found the stone-filled gap, even as Rhada Dhon had left it, and cleared it of stones.

Then we passed through the passage to the gravel plain. We made a camp there and spent a week searching for sapphires. At the end of the week we had gathered over four hundred blue sapphires of various weight and size. My Rajah was more fortunate than I. He found enough white sapphires to make the bracelet I have just given the Sahib Farley. I found no white sapphires, but he gave me the one you now see in my turban which was the largest one he had found.

"We dared not stay too long away from the ship's crew. We closed the gap again, and returned to our ship. We planned to come back to the island the next year. Our men had done well with their pearl hunting and thought nothing of our absence."

For the first time since the beginning of his long narrative the Hindoo paused, sighing. His listeners watched him with almost breathless interest. None of them wished to break the spell yet by speaking. They had not yet heard the end of the tale.

"There is little more to be said." The old man sighed again, then continued: "It was many years before we saw the Island of Sapphires again. Affairs of state claimed my Rajah. He fell in love and married. Then he had no mind to leave his wife and go adventuring. He rejoiced in the birth of his sons, and gave his whole effort to them, striving to rear them in honor and truth. You already know of

the trouble and sorrow they brought him when they had grown to manhood. During those unhappy years he clung to me. It was I who persuaded him to ease his burdened mind by making another voyage to his island.

"We made ready another secret expedition and returned to the island. Our men were loyal, but we had reason to believe that our ship was followed from afar by the ship of my Rajah's most bitter enemy. This enemy was an evil man who hated my Rajah for his truth and justice, and who had tried vainly to disgrace him in the eyes of the English powers, and of his own people. My Rajah always believed Ram Dhout to be a Tibetan, sent secretly by a Tibetan clan to India to gather riches. He coveted my Rajah's jewels, for Ashim Dhon had many others besides the sapphires we had found. Ram Dhout had even tried to learn how my Rajah came by them.

"The second time we went to the island my Rajah journeyed alone to the gravel plain. We had deemed it best that I should remain with the men to keep them occupied. My Rajah wished to remain away from the ship for some time and feared the men might grow restless and too curious concerning our absence, were they to be left so long alone.

"While he was away from us we sighted another ship. Our lookout declared it to be the same ship he had often seen following us at a distance on our voyage to the island. It hung

afar off, and at last disappeared. I suspected it to be the ship of Ram Dhout, but could make out little of it through the glasses. I knew, that, since we could not distinguish the strange ship plainly, those on board it could learn little of our movements. What I feared was that Ram Dhout might have a strong swimmer in his crew who could swim to the island, then spy upon us. I grew uneasy and impatient for my Rajah to return, but he remained away a long time. The strange ship had disappeared many days before he finally came back again to our ship.

"He was not greatly worried when he returned and heard my news. He argued, that, if a swimmer from the other ship had succeeded in reaching the island, he could learn little except the fact that our men were pearl diving. He had brought me the two blue sapphires I now wear in my turban. He had also collected enough stones to make a wonderful chain of his own planning. He had lost his taste for jewel gathering. He had longed only for the peace of mind which his stay in the solitude had restored to him.

"He made the chain. He was a master craftsman." The old Hindoo's head bowed itself a trifle as though in deference to his departed friend. Next instant he raised it again, proudly. A singularly beautiful smile suddenly brightened his somber face. "He made the chain for me, in token of our brotherhood. I will show it to you."

CHAPTER IX

TWO AND TWO MAKE FOUR

WITH a quick movement which the adventurers thought remarkable for one of his years, the Rajah's hand came from the neck of his robe, bringing with it a glittering flash of blue and white.

"Oh-h-h-h." A subdued, wondering shout went up from the adventurers. A buzz of characteristic exclamation followed as the Rajah displayed the sapphire chain for their benefit.

"Oh, mamma! It has the Ruby Temple beaten to a standstill!" Ralph cried in boyish enthusiasm.

His comrades were no less admiring than he of the sapphire chain. It was fully two yards in length and of exquisite beauty, both in the matter of jewels and workmanship. The body of the chain was composed of three thin strands of finely linked platinum. At intervals of two inches apart along the chain were set six-petaled flowers of blue sapphires. Each glittering blue flower petal radiated from a white sapphire center. The jeweled flowers were arranged along the chain in graduated sizes, beginning with tiny flowers on each side of the clasp which increased in matched size to the central flower.

It was formed of seven particularly large flawless sapphires.

"It is the most perfect piece of jewelry I have ever seen," was Arthur Farley's warm opinion of the sapphire chain.

"It is the creation of my Rajah," was the Hindoo's proud assurance. "He alone cut and polished the sapphires, made the chain of platinum and arranged the jeweled flowers upon it. He was one skilled in such arts."

"Did he make the Ruby Temple?" Bret questioned eagerly.

"No. It is very old; older than the first Rajah of Rhambour, who lived many generations before Rhada Dhon. My Rajah prized it highly. He gave his proudest possession to his friend, the Sahib General Farley."

"It became my grandfather's greatest treasure," Arthur Farley hastened to say.

"My Rajah never thought when he gave the temple to the Sahib General that it would cost him his life." The old man shook a mournful head. "Lalla Dhon had the heart of a tiger. I loathe his very name." Undying hatred gleamed from the Rajah's black eyes. He frowned darkly, then his face cleared as he said: "I will now give you the token which the Sahib General once gave my Rajah." His right hand again slid into an inner pocket of his robe.

"This *is* a surprise!" Arthur Farley's strong features were bright with happiness as he took the gift his grandfather had once made

the Rajah of Rhambour and gazed fondly down upon it. It was a cabinet-sized photograph of General Wynne Farley, set in a narrow frame of dull gold. It had been taken when the general was perhaps forty years old, and he had posed for it in the full dress uniform of the English Army.

"You've given me a treasure, Rajah," Farley cried gratefully. "We have only two pictures of my grandfather. One of them is a painting, done when he was about twenty years old. The other is a photograph of him in a white house suit, which he had taken at home to please my mother, shortly before he went to Upper Burma."

"This picture he sat for to please my Rajah," the old man explained. "Always my Rajah wished for a picture of the Sahib General in uniform. You have heard my message, Sahib Arthur, and have received my Rajah's token. I ask you—Are you convinced I am the true messenger of Ashim Dhon, Rajah of Rhambour, and friend of your Sahib Grandfather?" The Hindoo spoke in a tone of deep earnestness.

"I believed you to be the true messenger from the first words you said of Ashim Dhon," Farley said heartily.

"And you?" the Rajah bowed collectively to the others.

"Yes," welled in reassuring chorus from the other adventurers.

"Then I am repaid for my long search for

you, Sahib Arthur." The Rajah's face again brightened into a smile. "The Island of Sapphires is at last yours. What will you do with it?" There was a note of suppressed eagerness in the question.

"What will I do with it?" Farley sprang from his chair with a kind of delighted bounce. "What do you think I ought to do, fellows?" He turned to his smiling friends. "What would you like to do?"

A joyful babel of answers rose from his comrades.

"Oh, Jupiter Jinks! Let's start for it tomorrow," Ralph declared longingly. "Blamed if I can see Upper Burma for us now, with this dandy new prospect in sight. I'd like a trip to the Island of Sapphires, even if we never found a blue shiner after we struck the island."

"So should I," chimed in Jimmy. "It would be *some* adventure."

"It certainly has me going." Green's brown eyes shone with the longing of the world wanderer for newer trails.

"No snakes, or tigers, and the bug crop a failure sounds good to me," laughed Bret. "I'd like to hunt shiners in safety, just for a change."

"You haven't said a word yet, Oom Dad." Ralph cast a half anxious glance at his father. "For Pete's sake don't put the kibosh on our hopes."

"I'm waiting for Farley to say the word." The jewel man's eyes were twinkling. "Per-

sonally, I shouldn't mind adding a few good sapphires to my collection. Our yacht is at your disposal, Arthur."

"I say, let's go; the sooner the better." Farley was on fire with enthusiasm. "How is it with you, Rajah? Will you go with us, and show us the way?"

The Rajah had sat, listening to the merry confusion of voices, a beatified expression on his parchment-like face. "More has come to pass than I had hoped for," he replied solemnly. "I had thought, if I should at last find you, to offer to make ready a ship and ask you to permit me to show you my Rajah's secret island, and the paths we trod there. Still, I was concerned as to how I might find loyal seamen, once I had bought the ship. My wallahs are good men, and true, but they know nothing of the sea, nor of sailing boats. My house is full of rare treasures which they must ever guard in my absence. I could but hope you might be able to help me solve these problems. It seems I have not hoped in vain."

"Betcha you haven't." Deference to age vanished before Ralph's buoyant spirit. "We have the best boat going, and a crew that know how to sail her; all good, straight fellows, too. Our yacht's named the *Swallow*. We have her in dry dock now, and our men are in the city, on their own, till we get ready to call them in. We can have them all here by noon to-morrow."

"It is well." The old man smiled broadly at

Ralph. He had taken a decided fancy to the lively, slangy young man. "I would leave Calcutta quickly," he continued, sobering. "I have heard that Ram Dhout has been seen in the city, and within the past month. He is keen and hungry as a wolf on the scent of game. He may have learned long since that I have been seeking the Sahib Arthur, though he could not know why. Because he could not know, that is why he would try to learn, because he is my enemy."

"He'd be good and sorry in the long run if he ever tried spying upon you, or us, either," Ralph said belligerently. "This bunch can *fight*. We mind our own business, but we don't stand for any butting in to it from outsiders."

"He would not come here. He would not seek to meet the Sahib Arthur. That is not the way of Ram Dhout." The Rajah shook a knowing head. "He would have the Sahib Arthur murdered."

"Great guns!" Ralph's exclamation was one of shocked surprise at the Hindoo's assertion. Across his brain had flashed a sudden suspicion which a quick glance about his group of comrades informed him had also dawned simultaneously upon their minds.

"Now we are getting down to brass tacks," Stanley Green murmured with satisfaction. He said to the Hindoo: "Why should this man, Ram Dhout, wish to murder Farley?"

"Yes; that is something I should like to know.

A fine prospect, I'll say. My word!" Farley's tone was humorous rather than dismayed.

"I will explain this to you. My Rajah had great personal wealth, rare treasures and many priceless jewels. All this he willed to me. I believe Ram Dhout knows it. He knew of the friendship of my Rajah for the Sahib General Farley. Ram Dhout is old; almost as old as I. He is taller and stronger than I, and looks not unlike me. I have learned during my travels over India that, more than once, he has declared himself to be the Rajah of Khariwara. If he has learned of my search for the Sahib Arthur, no doubt he has surmised that it is because of a rich bequest from my Rajah to the house of Farley. My Rajah knew not that the Sahib General had died in Upper Burma. Perhaps Ram Dhout knew it. Since the Sahib General had died, only I was left to be removed from his path, Ram Dhout dreams of a day when he shall claim all I possess for himself under my name."

"Oh, he could hardly succeed in any such villainous scheme. The odds against him would be too great," Farley broke in. "You could appeal to the government for protection against him, you know. In such case, he would be kept under surveillance by secret service men. Our government is anxious to preserve the higher rank of East Indians. So few of the older nobles are left, you know."

"No, no," the old man protested. "My busi-

ness is not for the government to know. You do not understand. For myself I have no fear of Ram Dhout. He only deceives himself when he plans to murder me, and claim my estates. He is clever, but not so clever as I. I am prepared against him. This is my meaning. If Ram Dhout knew I sought you, he would try to prevent our meeting by having you murdered before you could reach me. I had some misgiving for your safety when the Sahib Edwards told me you were to arrive at Calcutta on the ship this morning. I was half determined to speak of this fear to the Sahib Edwards. But I had confidence in these youths to conduct you safely to the hotel, and held my peace. I knew Ram Dhout would never make the mistake of having you molested in the street in the light of day. He works ever in the dark. I would rather believe Ram Dhout knows not of you, Sahib Arthur. Still, it is prudent to be always forearmed against what might come to pass." The Rajah stopped, casting a half appealing glance at his attentive audience.

"You've made no mistake about Ram Dhout, Rajah."

The Hindoo's small eyes darted to the Englishman's face with significant foreboding. "What know you of Ram Dhout?" he asked sharply.

"The time has come to spill the beans. Oh, glory! I'm glad of it." Ralph's voice rose to

a relieved height. "Wise the Rajah, Farley, about the snakefest this morning."

"Yes, Farley. The time has come to put two and two together."

Farley understood from Malcolm Edwards' tone that the Rajah of Khariwara had passed muster into the fellowship of the adventurers.

By the time Farley had reached the point of recital where Green had fired his revolver at the wicker basket the Rajah was on his feet, hopping about frantically.

"You have seen the work of Ram Dhout!" he piped in high excitement. "Who but Ram Dhout could have put the cobra in the basket without having been stung by it. Once he was a snake charmer, and handled his vile cobras in the plazas. That was long ago when he was young and owned nothing but these pests, and the sandals he walked in. Now I am sure he has known of my search for the Sahib Arthur."

"He must have known," Green nodded thoughtful agreement. "It was probably Ram Dhout's ship that hung off the Island of Sapphires while you and the Rajah of Rhambour were on the island. He was on the treasure scent then. Perhaps he's on it still. It may be that particular little old island he covets, rather than your treasures. It looks to me as though he might actually know something about Ashim Dhon's bequest to Farley."

"He might suspect something of the sort. He could not know it." The Hindoo's turbaned

head wagged a vigorous negative. "Never have these papers," he waved toward the little sheaf of papers Farley had laid on a nearby table, "been away from my person, out of my sight, since my Rajah gave them to me."

"Maybe he slid into your room at your house and looked 'em over while you were asleep," Jimmy Stone suggested, recalling the old man's seemingly deep sleep of the early morning.

"This could not be. You thought me deep in sleep last night and this morning." The old man regarded Jimmy with mild amusement. "I was asleep until you sahibs sought your beds. Then you slept, and I remained awake. When you awoke and rose to go to meet the Sahib Farley, I went to sleep again. I knew the Sahib Edwards would guard me. Never do I sleep, unguarded, and no sound of the night escapes my ears."

"Maybe he got hold of the papers while Ashim Dhon still had 'em," Bret advanced this view of the mystery.

"This I have sometimes suspected." The Rajah bent approving eyes upon Bret. "Still, my Rajah was wary. He was not to be caught napping. He had no servitors who proved disloyal. If Ram Dhout knows too much of my Rajah's bequest, he alone can say how he came by the knowledge."

The adventurers continued to discuss the mystery with the Rajah at some length. The old Hindoo disapproved strongly of the part the

police officers had played in the matter. Reassured by Farley and Malcolm Edwards that he had been left entirely out of the affair, he accepted the situation with better grace.

"Oh, shucks! We can't sail to-morrow, after all," was Ralph's disappointed cry. "I forgot about Chuma. When do you expect him, Farley?"

"He was to sail for India on the *Marchmont,* three days later than the *Arana.* Since the *Arana* was storm-driven, and docked late, the *Marchmont* ought to be in to-morrow, provided she escaped the gale."

"What about going to the dock to meet him?" Ralph glanced inquiringly around the circle.

"I wouldn't advise it," Farley replied.

"Nor I," echoed the jewel man. "It will be best for him to come here alone. This cobra affair proves in itself that we have been spied upon. The less we are seen abroad, the less the enemy will know of our movements. It will be necessary for two of us to go down to the yacht and prepare her for quick sailing. I'll leave it to you, Ralph, to round up the crew. You can do it entirely by 'phone. Green, you had better go to the yacht with me. We've plenty of dry provisions on board. We'll get in only enough fresh stuff to last us as far as Ceylon. We can stock up the *Swallow* there. We must make a quick, smooth get-away. The rest of you boys can stay up here with the Rajah. Bring your luggage, and bunk with us to-night,

Farley. From now on we will have our meals sent up to the apartment."

Glad to be on the move again, Malcolm Edwards issued directions to his flock with the calm good judgment which marked him as leader.

"What about Dand——?" This time it was Jimmy who nearly came to grief. "Why—that is—er—we're going to have a dandy time, aren't we?" he wound up flatly, looking sheepish.

"We hope *you* will, but you'd better be careful how you act." Ralph fixed dancing eyes upon Jimmy.

"Yes, and what *you* say," warned Bret.

"Oh, go fly a kite. Better take that advice to yourselves," Jimmy flung back defiantly.

Luckily for Jimmy, the Rajah had no inkling of his new name. He sat smiling contentedly in his chair, his attention fixed upon Farley who was gathering together the little pile of papers on the table.

"We may not be able to clear to-morrow. It will depend entirely upon whether, or not, Chuma arrives. If he does, we will slip out of harbor just before midnight. At that time we shall attract little curious attention. Pardon me, Rajah," the jewel man looked suddenly embarrassed. "I have been making plans for our get-away without consulting your interests. Please say what you may wish to do. You may,

perhaps, wish to go to your house before we sail. We are at your service, you know."

"We are one," the Hindoo said with finality. "My wallahs know their business in my absence. I shall remain here. You have my permission to report me to the clerk as your guest. Register my name as that of Dhurbar Khow. This is a part of my name, and not an alias. I shall not wear my turban when we leave the hotel to go to the yacht. Instead one of you may lend me a helmet. It will come far down over my ears and hide my face. I shall turn my robe inside out. It is lined with black. Often before I have done this. When we are in the taxicab I shall adjust a disguise which I carry always with me. I promise you, you will not believe me to be the same man."

CHAPTER X

INTO THE UNKNOWN

FORTUNE seemingly smiled favor upon the adventurers. Chuma arrived the next morning at the hotel at about ten o'clock. Without exception the crew of the *Swallow* responded promptly to Ralph's telephone messages. Skipper Green went about his business of getting the yacht out of dry dock and launching her on the estuary with his usual snap and precision. Generously distributed rupees among the native carriers brought the supplies to the *Swallow's* dock in good season.

Chuma, keen and invaluable as a scout, hung unobtrusively about the hotel lounge, on the lookout for either Ram Dhout, or spies which that enemy might employ to trail Farley, the Rajah, or any other of the adventurers. An introduction to the Rajah, and an hour's conversation with the old man in Hindustanee had put Chuma in complete touch with the situation. The Rajah was delighted with Chuma, and soon fell to addressing him as "my son," an appellation which the Adventure Boys grinningly saved up to "rag" Chuma with, later.

To the Adventure Boys it seemed as though the day would never wear away and night descend. They were impatient to leave Calcutta

behind again for the ever-fascinating adventure trail. They thoroughly enjoyed the secrecy of movement which must mark their departure from the ancient city, and out to sea. The life they loved was unfolding before them, once more, full of new and pleasing variety.

Shortly before seven o'clock that evening Malcolm Edwards returned to the Arlington from the yacht. Stanley Green had remained on the *Swallow,* there to complete the last detail before the night's clearing of the harbor. The apartment at the Arlington had been previously leased by the jewel man for a year. It remained to him merely to notify the hotel manager that he and his party would leave the hotel that night, to be absent from Calcutta indefinitely. Whatever mail might be received for them at the desk was to be left in care of the manager himself until their return. The adventurers purposed leaving no clew by which they might be traced.

When, at half past nine, the yacht's party stepped from their apartment, and into the elevator cage, it would have been difficult, except at close range, to identify the Rajah as the well-dressed Hindoo gentleman who had entered the Arlington two evenings before. The white helmet he had borrowed from Ralph set far down over his face. His plain black robe gave him a clerical air which his purposely-bent shoulders accentuated. In traversing the lounge to a side entrance of the building, where a taxicab

awaited the party, he cleverly managed to change his formerly dignified gait to an all but shuffling step.

The adventurers were due to receive a "shock," however, when they finally emerged from the taxicab at a point just above the wharf where the *Swallow* tied up. The taxi, subjected to thorough flashlight inspection on their part before they entered it, was in semi-darkness during the ride to the yacht. By the intermittent light of the street lamps, through the windows, they could make out the Rajah as engaged in some project of his own which kept his hands busily raised to his face.

"Sweet mother!" Jimmy, moved by surprise, forgot Malcolm Edwards' injunction to silence during the journey to the yacht. First out of the taxi, he caught sight of a figure emerging from the cab, which challenged his amazement. The Hindoo at whom he now stared was attired in a black robe, identical with that worn by the Rajah. Above the robe, however, rose the head of a black-haired, mustached man, of hardly middle age. His cheeks and lips held a tinge of color under his brown skin. The small gayly-striped turban on his head served to heighten the effect. Stepping from the cab, he seemed taller, and broader of shoulder than the Rajah. Jimmy could hardly believe he was seeing the Rajah, instead of a stranger.

"Sh-h-h." Malcolm Edwards made a warning sound. He was scarcely less astonished

than Jimmy at the remarkable transformation and was amusedly wondering how first sight of the changed Rajah would strike Green.

Silent as a band of shadows, the adventure group crossed the short wharf to where the *Swallow* jauntily rode the river, trim and clean-lined. Their luggage had already gone ahead with Green and the jewel man on their first trip to the yacht. They proceeded to the yacht, empty-handed, revolvers in their coat pockets, ready for any emergency.

Not until they were safely on board the yacht, however, and gathered in the *Swallow's* cheerful cabin, with the shades drawn down, did the pending storm of exclamation, occasioned by the Rajah's disguise, break forth.

"*Can you beat that?*" Jimmy was still in the throes of his amazement. Seated beside Bret on a wicker lounge the pair of chums were engaged in taking delighted stock of the Rajah.

"Say, Chuma, I didn't know you had a little papa."

Chuma's usually grave features broke into laughter at Bret's teasing sally. "In this life we find many surprises," he said humorously.

"Right-o. I'll say the Rajah sprang one on us. He certainly had us guessing for a minute or so," Jimmy said, smiling broadly at Chuma's "little papa."

"He looks like anybody but himself. He gave me a jolt. I hadn't expected to see a stranger come aboard." Green had turned the wheel

over to the first mate while he went on deck to see the outfit come on board.

"Some little disguise." Ralph was grinning his approval at the black-haired, heavily-browed "stranger."

The Rajah of Khariwara said not a word. He merely sat still in a wicker arm chair and beamed at his admiring comrades of adventure. He had purposely removed his gayly-striped turban so as to display a shock of jet-black hair, in itself sufficient to change his identity.

"Do you imagine we were trailed by any one, Chuma?" Farley put anxious question to his man.

"No. Only two machines besides ours were marked in front of the hotel. Both were empty, and belonged to private Hindoo gentlemen who had gone into the hotel to the billiard room. I made sure of this much. There were no cars at the side entrance uutil our driver brought up the taxicab we came here in."

"How about the driver?" Green asked.

"The Sahib Edwards told me to choose one from among those of the hotel whom I thought best for us to employ. This afternoon I chose one, but said nothing to him; merely watched him as he came and went with his fares. Just before nine o'clock this evening I saw him take the luggage of an English sahib to his taxi. I heard the English sahib tell the driver to take him to a certain railway station. It was not more than a mile away from the hotel. I waited

for the driver to return, then spoke to him, asking him to take us to the wharf at once to catch a night boat. I promised him triple fare if he would drive fast. He was glad to earn so much money at one trip. He thought nothing of us, only of driving fast and still escaping the traffic officers," Chuma ended with his slow smile.

"Do you think it was a clean get-away, Chuma?" Mr. Edwards asked anxiously.

"I believe it was. The Rajah has described Ram Dhout to me. I think I should have recognized him, even under a disguise, if he had come to the hotel, or lurked in the street." Chuma spoke with quiet positiveness.

"I doubt if he was even in the offing," Green said. "He's probably lying low since the cobra racket. I'll say he was tucked away in some hole or corner at the dock that day to see his little snake stunt pulled off. It didn't turn out as he had planned it—if he *is* the one who planned it."

"Suspicion points more strongly to him than to an unknown enemy," Farley argued. "We have the Rajah's opinion, well-founded, that he was after me to murder me. Proceeding upon that hypothesis I'm dashed if I can fathom how he worked the cobra stunt so cleverly. Granted he'd learned that I was coming off the *Arana* that morning, and that you fellows were to meet me, he couldn't possibly know beforehand that the driver was going to beat it up

the dock to a wine pagoda, unless he and the driver understood each other. Yet we've all agreed that the driver had nothing to do with it."

"No; we can count that brownie out of it. My theory is that he was on hand at the wharf, strictly out of sight with the roses and the basket. Maybe he'd intended to send a native up to us with them just as we were about to get into the taxi. In such case, he might easily have ordered his messenger to poke them at you, then beat it in a hurry. You know how fast one of those brownies can move, provided he's been paid well to skidoo," Green reminded. "Luck simply stepped his way, and he took advantage of it. Some clever villain."

"You have spoken well. Ram Dhout and his cobras are one in this—both can strike quickly." The Rajah had come out of his contented silence to approve Green's surmise. "You have a far-seeing brain, excellent youth."

"Thank you, Rajah." A half-embarrassed flush sprang to Green's tanned cheeks. "May I compliment you upon your own cleverness. Your disguise is a winner. It had me guessing."

"I shall remove it now. I like not this black hair tickling my neck." The old man lifted the black wig from his head with an audible sigh of relief. Next he slipped off his sandals, removing from each a nicely-fitted pad which had served to build up his height. He then rose

from his chair and proceeded to turn his robe with the embroidered side out again. From the shoulders of the robe came two more pads and from inside his linen tunic came his jeweled turban and a small, flat black lacquered box. Opening the box he displayed for his amused audience's benefit a complete make-up outfit on a small scale.

"What do you know about that?" Jimmy was moved to wondering admiration for the clever old man. "By Jinks! I was wondering what had become of your turban."

"Got anything else stowed away in your robe?" Ralph chuckled.

"This." From a side pocket of his robe the Rajah produced a revolver, and from another pocket a box of cartridges. He handled the firearm as though accustomed to the use of it. "As yet," he said, "it has never brought death to any one, but there may be a bullet there for Ram Dhout. It has been a good day." He yawned widely, stretching his arms above his head. "To-night I shall sleep with both eyes closed. You have my permission to show me a bed. Kindly disturb me not. I wish no food. I wish only to sleep."

"Aren't you hungry? You haven't eaten a blessed thing since you came to us," Ralph solicitously reminded. The Rajah had declined food from the time of his arrival into the adventurers' apartment, accepting nothing but water.

"Be not concerned because I wish no food. I shall eat when hunger comes, not before. Good night, my brothers." He glanced expectantly at Green.

The sailor understood the glance and conducted the Hindoo to the comfortable little stateroom which had been reserved for the adventurers' odd guest. Returning shortly to his comrades in the cabin the jewel hunters settled down to the first really private discussion they had found opportunity for since the Rajah of Khariwara's advent among them.

"Ashim Dhon must certainly have been a live wire right up to the time he passed out," Ralph observed meditatively, during a brief lull in the animated, low-toned conversation which the adventurers had been busily carrying on. "He's been dead at least fifteen years, but the poor old Rajah has been hot-footing it over India ever since then, trying to carry out Dhon's wishes. Now, here we are, hitting it up for his little old island, full speed ahead."

"Maybe we won't be able to find it, after all," Jimmy observed rather doubtfully. "A lot of things can happen inside of fifteen years. Maybe the sea has washed over it, and then swallowed it."

"I doubt it. It's the small islands, founded on coral reefs, that the sea generally puts a kibosh on," Green replied. "According to description, this particular island must have a solid, rocky foundation. I have an idea we'll

find it, provided the latitude and longitude, as marked on the chart, are accurate."

"What will we find on the island, once we reach it?" Farley said speculatively. "That is what I've been wondering. It may have been rediscovered and claimed by some one else. Just the same, it's mine." Farley's jaws set determinedly. "Thanks to Ashim Dhon's wise methods I can show a clear deed to the island. The Rajah told me that Rhada Dhon's claim of the island is still on record in the Department of Deeds in Calcutta."

"What would you do if you were to find when we got to your island that some other fellow was sporting around it as discoverer and owner?" Bret asked curiously.

"I'd order him off it, of course; without a fight, if I could. If I couldn't—then I'd fight him for it," was Farley's calm ultimatum.

"Nine chances to ten no one else has set foot on the island since Ashim Dhon's last visit to it," Green said. "Most of these sea-roving fellows, who go scouring the seven seas for treasure, captain schooners. They steer clear of rock piles. That's likely to be the way this island appears at a distance to passing ships. The average sea rover would stand well off it. He can't possibly guess what the sea may be going to do next. To go too near it and be caught in a blow would mean a sure drive upon the rocks."

"It's not exactly a safe proposition for the

Swallow, either, is it?" Ralph asked lightly.

"No. We are up against the same old bogie that has dogged every jewel hunt we've been on—danger. We've won safely through them all. I've a hunch our luck will hold this time," Green made optimistic answer. "Besides, as your skipper, it's up to me, strictly, to keep the *Swallow* off the rocks."

"Bing! Cr-r-ash! Ker-smash! Down goes the *Swallow!*" Bret attempted a floundering imitation of such a catastrophe. Unintentionally, he floundered forcefully against Jimmy. Not expecting the collision, Jimmy took a staggering backward step and sat down heavily on the cabin floor.

Thought of danger which had momentarily claimed the adventurers vanished in a gale of laughter. Jimmy was up in a twinkling, engaging in a hot pursuit of agile Bret about the cabin, while the others looked laughingly on, and encouraged the chase. With the steady speeding of the *Swallow* out to sea, and toward the unknown, the spirits of the Adventure Boys were exuberantly rising. Nothing mattered save one glorious reality. They were adventure-bound again.

CHAPTER XI

SIGHTING THE ISLAND

"THERE she blows!" Up in the *Swallow's* tiny look-out tower, Stanley Green lowered the glasses with a triumphant shout. "See it?"

"Yes." His own glasses still at his eyes, Malcolm Edwards continued to peer fixedly through them at a distant dark spot on the gently rippling sea. "Think it's our island, Green."

"Yep; and a merry chase we've had trying to pick it up." Green sighed delighted relief. "If that's not it, then I'll never say where it is. Everything's in our favor, too. It's just daylight, the sea's like a mill pond this morning, and there's no indication of storm in the sky. Ashim Dhon must have been a trifle off in his longitude calculation. That's why we haven't sighted the island before now. Hope he had the right dope about the channel. I can't afford to make any mistakes. That rock-pile is a danger spot, unless one knows the right sea road to it. There's plenty of reason why it would be healthy to give that whirlpool over there the grand go-by."

"Through the glasses, the sea still looks about the same to me over there as it does here," the jewel man confessed, smiling.

"It's far from being like the sea we're now sailing. There's a hummer of an undertow to buck against, and no doubt a lot of nasty hidden reefs. Oh, glory! I've a sweet job ahead of me. Will you pass the good word to the rest of the gang, Mr. Edwards? I must take the wheel from now on."

His face bright with elation, Stanley Green turned and raced down the ladder of the little tower with the agility acquired by long years at sea. While his comrades had been enjoying the refreshing ocean breeze, after their long stay in the intense heat of Calcutta, the sailor had been spending long hours in the cabin poring over maps and charts and comparing them with the chart and written directions for finding the island, as drawn by Rhada Dhon, rajah adventurer of generations before. The sailor had had "the time of his life" in preparing himself for the hazardous task of steering the *Swallow* safely to the Island of Sapphires. Now face to face with the crucial task, the finding of, then the steering of the yacht through the channel to the island, he was longing to be up, and at it.

Nearly a month had passed since the *Swallow* had slipped quietly out of the Calcutta harbor at midnight, her trim nose pointed toward the open sea. The adventurers had made a few days' stop on the island of Ceylon, there to complete their purchase of supplies adequate for the trip. Strictly on their guard at all times

while going about one of the small seaports of Ceylon, where the yacht had anchored briefly, they had encountered nothing of a seemingly suspicious nature. The Rajah of Khariwara had emphatically refused to make one of the party during the adventurers' buying expeditions on shore. He had also demanded that Arthur Farley should remain on board the yacht with him while the others were absent from it. He was not inclined to believe that his ancient enemy, Ram Dhout, had been thrown completely off his and Farley's trail. It would be wiser, he argued, for the two to keep to the yacht.

Malcolm Edwards had taken the time before leaving Calcutta to pay a hurried call on Lieutenant Bagley at Station S. The officer had nothing to report save that several of his plain-clothes men were keeping a watchful eye upon the various snake charmers scattered about the city. Along the dock, Officer Murdock had also been busy in an endeavor to discover if any person, or persons, employed about the dock, and on his beat, recalled having seen, on the morning of the *Arana's* arrival, a passing native, carrying a wicker basket and a bouquet of red roses. Thus far, however, he had not been successful in his effort to pick up a clew. The lieutenant had assured the jewel man, however, that the investigation would be continued during the absence of the adventurers from the city. Mr. Edwards had deemed it best to fur-

nish the lieutenant with a description of Ram Dhout, with a brief explanation that Mr. Farley suspected the Hindoo of having been concerned in the attempt against his life. The lieutenant had promised that a secret search of the city would be made for Ram Dhout, and, if he should be apprehended, he would be detained without bail until the return to Calcutta of the adventurers.

"Green believes he has sighted the island," was the joyful message the jewel man carried below to the deck where his flock were taking a before-breakfast constitutional in pajamas.

"Oh, glory! Let me get my glasses!" Ralph crossed the deck in three or four long jumps, and disappeared into the cabin. He was back in a moment, glasses to his eyes, eagerly sweeping the rippling expanse of ocean.

Bret and Jimmy also hustled cabinward for their glasses, Mr. Edwards having passed his to Arthur Farley. The *Swallow* was still too far away from the small dark spot which Mr. Edwards pointed out as Green's "pick-up" for the excited group to be able to guess much about it, even through the glasses. None of them were the possessors of sea-trained eyes like Stanley Green's.

"I can't tell a thing about it," Ralph cried out disappointedly. "Leave it to Greenie. He knows his blamed old sea. I'm going up where he is and get a little of his sea dope."

"No, boy, let Green alone." Malcolm Ed-

wards' tone halted impetuous Ralph half way across the deck. "He's not up in the lookout box now. He has gone to take the wheel. We must leave him to himself entirely, unless he sends for any of us. He has a ticklish task before him."

"Then I'm going to wise Dandelion." Ralph rushed blithely away to tell the Rajah the glorious news.

"He needs something to wake him up," Bret chuckled. "Maybe this will do the trick."

From the time the *Swallow* had steamed away from Ceylon the Rajah had mostly given himself over to sleep. He ate little except rice, which he insisted upon going into the galley to boil, greatly to the amusement of Saunders, the yacht's cook. A bowl of rice, in the morning, constituted his daily menu. Three times a day he walked briskly about the deck for half an hour, then he repaired to his stateroom and slept.

Mr. Edwards had enjoined the ship's three noise-makers, Bret, Ralph and Jimmy, to quiet when they were in the near vicinity of the old man's stateroom. Mischievous Ralph decided that, for once, he would let loose. He burst into the Rajah's stateroom with a stentorian shout of, "Ahoy, ahoy! Land ahead. Last stop, Sapphire Island. Have your tickets ready!"

"You roar like a young lion." The Rajah shot up in bed with his usual Jack-in-the-box celerity. He surveyed Ralph indulgently, and

with a broad smile. "Well, it is time to waken, and remain awake. I have had a long rest. I shall now be as a new man, and prepared for whatever may come. You have my permission to bring me my glasses. They are in the wall cupboard, over there." He waved toward the cupboard, reached for his embroidered robe, hung near his berth, and hurriedly slipped it on over the white linen underrobe he wore day and night. Without waiting for Ralph to hand him the glasses he swung out of bed, and scurried from the room, headed for the deck.

Ralph followed him, carrying the glasses, smiling to himself over the Rajah's calm comparison. It hadn't taken Dandelion long to get back at him for yelling.

"It is the island." The Hindoo confirmed Green's "pick-up" after a protracted examination of the dark spot through the glasses. "I have seen it twice before, and am not to be deceived, even by distance. Before long we shall be able to catch its outline and see the top of the high peak which rises above all else on the island."

The adventurers could hardly bear to tear themselves away from the deck to respond to the breakfast call. While they were below in the cozy little mess room eating a hasty breakfast and discussing animatedly the longed-for discovery which the coming of dawn had unfolded to them, the Rajah stood motionless at the rail, his glasses trained upon the gradually-

enlarging dark spot off to the south of the *Swallow's* bow.

Meanwhile the *Swallow* was skimming over the dimpled morning sea at the highest rate of speed her triumphantly-excited pilot could command. Green had determined to "let her out" to her last notch of speed until she had come fairly near to a certain point in the course he was following where he hoped and believed the channel began. Slow speed ahead would then become the order of procedure, while he rose to wrestle with the most enjoyable task which had, as yet, ever been given to him to perform.

At eight o'clock the *Swallow's* swift progress had brought her within a few miles of the island. Its bleak, rocky outline had now began to stand out plainly through the glasses. Up in the pilot house, Green was keeping a vigilant watch for the moment when he anticipated a change would take place in the character of the water. At twenty minutes past eight the anticipated change had not come.

The careful young skipper had already sent an order down the speaking tube to one of the sailors to warn the deck party into the cabin. "Tell them to hang around near the wall supports, ready to grab 'em. You boys around ship, look to yourselves, too," he directed. "Something is going to happen before long, and, make no mistake, it's going to happen plenty."

He had previously told his comrades, and the Rajah had supported his prophesy, that they might expect "a whale of a shaking-up" just before the *Swallow* struck the channel. The Rajah had passed through the trying experience twice before. He could offer no explanation of the strange sea phenomenon. Green, however, had advanced the theory that the violent rocking of the ship at that particular point on the sea, which the Rajah described as having taken place on both of the previous voyages he had made to the island, had been caused by an unusually swift-flowing ocean current which the ship had crossed.

He went further to theorize that the ocean current must, therefore, flow parallel with the western side of the island, since the course of the ship on both previous voyages, according to the Rajah of Rhambour's chart, was west by south-west until the point on the sea had been reached where the pitching of the ship had begun. From there it had been due south through a more tranquil sea. The ship of Rhada Dhon, discoverer of the island had, undoubtedly, he believed, floundered helplessly in the treacherous current and been driven diagonally across it to the beach. Instead of, later, finding a passage out to sea again, the divers had found the usual sea, uninfluenced by the hidden current.

Green's wrist watch showed exactly half-past eight o'clock when the *Swallow* gave a sudden,

terrific plunge forward which all but tore his hands from the wheel, flinging him with force against one side of the pilot house. Down in the cabin the adventurers were "standing fast." Each man had prudently fastened an arm through one of the projecting iron supports which stood out at various points about the cabin. They had obeyed Green's warning with the usual amount of joking on the part of Ralph, Jimmy and Bret.

With the *Swallow's* first convulsive plunge all three decided that the "shaking-up" was no joke. Without the protection of the stout iron supports they would have gone down like nine-pins, hit by an invisible ball, to be helplessly battered about.

"Gee whiz! This is *awful.* The *Swallow* is trying to stand on her head, I'll say," gasped Jimmy. "Guess we're due to take a smash on the rocks, too."

For, perhaps, ten minutes the *Swallow* continued to pitch wildly, as though grasped and rocked by giant invisible hands. All of a sudden the terrific churning ceased. With a final lurch the sturdy yacht righted herself and resumed a steady course.

CHAPTER XII

AN INHOSPITABLE SHORE

"HE'S done it! Bully for Green! Some pilot." Ralph had begun an exultant prance about the cabin, hurrahing buoyantly for Green. The others quickly took up the joyful shout.

Green heard the shouting and smiled. He was longing to be down among the exultant group in the cabin. Duty tied him to the wheel, though there now seemed little danger but that the *Swallow* would win through the channel without mishap. Two of the sailors had begun to take soundings, reporting to him through the tube with every few yards the yacht ran. Their reports satisfied Green that the depth of the channel was great enough to preclude a smash upon hidden reefs.

At ten o'clock that morning the Adventure Boys were on deck again, and seeing the Island of Sapphires at close range. Green had anchored the yacht a trifle less than an eighth of a mile from the island's rock-bound coast, and the adventurers were making quick preparation to go ashore.

After considerable discussion it had been decided that the crew of the yacht should be left on board at all times. The *Swallow's* naphtha launch would just nicely hold the adventure

group themselves, and could be relied upon for a speedy get-away in the face of impending danger, once they were landed upon the island. While they did not anticipate trouble, they had ventured too often in perilous corners of the globe not to know the value of being always prepared for any emergency.

"Blamed if I can see any breaks in those rocks," Ralph declared as he scanned the frowning rocky rise from the deck. "It looks to me like one grand little rock pile. If there's green country behind it, you'll have to show me the way to it. I guess I'd have to be a bird to get there. What?"

"Don't be so down-hearted," teased Bret. "Leave it to Dandelion to do the guide act. He certainly has come to life again."

The Rajah's long nap had evidently done him good. Resplendent in his jeweled turban, with the jewels on display, he moved about the deck, viewing the island from one point, then another, a figure of alert expectancy.

"Yonder, on the other side of that huge, jutting rock is the way up the cliff which my Rajah and I took," the old man was saying to Malcolm Edwards. He raised a long lean finger toward a great, out-cropping rock, situated a short distance to the left of the point where the *Swallow* had dropped anchor. "It is hard to climb to the top, but, going down the other side into the valley, the descent becomes easier."

"It's a cheerless old gloom patch." Jimmy

was taking in his new surroundings with a disfavoring eye. "It's no wonder passing ships keep right on going without an eye-blink at this stone heap."

"Now, now, James. You don't know when you're lucky," Ralph teasingly rallied. "Think of all the pretty blue and white shiners you are going to pick up."

"Uh-huh. Maybe." Jimmy's tone was ironic.

"How far are we going to-day, Oom Dad?" Ralph was full of youthful expectancy. "Can't we take a day's rations along, and keep right on going, after we strike the valley?"

"No. We must come back to the yacht before dark. We'll go over the rocks and take a look at the valley to-day, and that's all. After we've given it a once-over, we'll know better how to prepare for the trip across it. We may not find it as Ashim Dhon saw it years ago. We had better make haste slowly. We have plenty of time in which to become familiar with it before crossing it. I believe it a good plan to stick fairly close to the yacht, at first."

"Oh, very well." Ralph read finality in his father's reply. His light tone masked his disappointment. "You haven't a trouble hunch, have you, Oom Bossy Dad?" he added, flashing a half serious glance at his father.

"No." There was a certain odd hesitation in the "No," however, which his comrades instantly caught.

"I imagine you feel about as I do," Stanley Green broke in. "Now that my worry about making a safe come-up to the island is over, I feel as though this island was a 'too-good-to-be-true' proposition. On every one of the other jewel hunts we've made, it has been a case of fighting for every inch of the ground, from start to finish. This time it promises to be a walk-away. That seems strange to me."

"Precisely the way I feel in the matter, Stanley," nodded the jewel man. "I advocate proceeding with the same old caution we used on the veldt and in the hills." Casting a quick glance at the Rajah, who was engaged in pointing out something on shore to Farley, he dropped his voice and continued: "The Rajah seems confident he will find that no special change has taken place on the island. Ashim Dhon was a god to him. The Rajah is a shrewd old fellow, but—he is very old—inclined to be childish in some respects. Then, too, he is living now in the romance of his and Dhon's adventures. He can't conceive of any one else laying claim to the Island of Sapphires—unless it might be Ram Dhout."

"I understand. No reason for giving him a jolt by doing any trouble-barking. Let him dream on. Just the same, a gang of Malay pirates, or, maybe, treasure-hunting Mongols may have things in hand over there, for all we can guess. Merely supposition, of course." Green shrugged his broad shoulders. "Any-

how, 'Watch your step' is the same good old saw for us to stick to."

"It's the only one. We'll go over the rocks and down into the valley to-day, free-handed, with revolvers in holster, and plenty of cartridges."

"Good work," Green approved. "Perhaps I'd best tell Saunders to make us up a package of sandwiches. Rock-shinnying is a hungry job."

"I wish you would. I'm going now, to climb into my corduroys and high boots." The jewel man left the deck to prepare for the trip on shore.

"That's a confoundedly poor excuse for a beach," Farley remarked to Green. The Rajah had caught sight of Chuma, just emerging from the companionway, and had vanished cabinward after him.

"It's the only one the island has, I'll venture to say," returned the sailor. "As nearly as I can judge from here, it looks to me as if the sea came right up to the rocks on three sides of the island. You remember? The Rajah told us that Rhada Dhon thought he heard the wash of waves when he had reached the great stone wall at the western end of the island."

"Let's clean up the gravel plain first of blue and white shiners, then take a day off and cruise around three sides of the island. Of course, we'll give the ocean-current side the go-by.

How about a trip like that, Skipper Green?" Ralph asked airily.

"Nothing doing. You must have a grudge against the *Swallow.*"

"What do you want to do? Feed your pals, and their shiners to the fishes?" Bret inquired severely. "You must want to get acquainted with the sharks."

"You're a busy little question hound. I can't see you." Ralph started across the deck. "Go answer your own questions." He went down the companionway, laughing.

"I must get busy." Green left the rail and went below to give final orders to the engineer before going ashore. From the engine room he went in search of Dearborn, the first mate, who would be left in charge of the yacht during Green's absence on shore.

"Don't allow any of the boys shore leave, Dearborn," charged Green. "We expect to be back on the yacht by sunset. If we shouldn't come back to-night, don't worry. If we shouldn't appear to-morrow night, then wait till sunrise the morning following and head a shore party of four to look for us. Be sure, if you should have to go ashore, to go well-armed. And try to keep to cover. It's best. There's a valley on the other side of that cliff." He nodded toward the island. "We are going down into it. Farnham will take us ashore, and bring back the launch. He'll be shown the point

where our climb will begin. At five o'clock this afternoon post a lookout to watch for us."

"Aye, aye, sir. In case we might have to form a shore party to look for you and your friends, would we better fire the *Swallow's* gun signal, when we got to the top of the cliff?"

"I don't know." Green frowned brief puzzlement. As yet none of the *Swallow's* crew had been apprised of the real nature of the expedition to the island. His brow clearing, he said: "No, if you should have to make search for us, make it a still hunt. This island is, supposedly, uninhabited, but we've yet to find that out. Even as many as eight of us wouldn't stand much chance for our lives if we ran, slam-bang, into a horde of Mongol, or Malay pirates, when we struck the bottom of the valley. We're not looking for any such surprise party. Still, we're going it blind into the valley, to a certain extent. If you should have to form a search party, make it a soft-foot affair. I'm telling you this because I know that's precisely what you would do if we failed to show up on the beach at the appointed time."

"Yes, sir, I would do just that." A flush had risen to the mate's tanned cheeks at Green's implied confidence in his loyalty. "I guess you'll be back all right, though. You gentlemen have fought your way out of some pretty tight places. I can't say much for the looks of that island. It's a gloomy-looking rock stack."

"Something like that." Green laughed, then

hurried on his way to complete the round of instructions he must issue to his crew before taking brief leave of the yacht.

The speedy naphtha launch made quick work of the run to the island's narrow strip of beach, shadowed by grim overhanging rocks, where the adventurers purposed to land. As it drew nearer the beach, the puffing of the noisy little launch made a welcome break in the oppressively deep stillness which pervaded the lonely shore.

"My, what a lively place!" Youthfully irked by the still shore, Ralph's first thought lay toward shattering the silence. "Shall I throw a few whoops, and make things stir?" he suggested mischievously.

"No. Better keep quiet," his father hastily cautioned. "You might succeed in stirring up trouble for us. We've yet to learn what's on the other side of those rocks."

"Notice how quiet I am. Try to imitate me," Bret beamed patronizingly upon Ralph.

"Are you. I hadn't noticed——"

"Ou-ch-h-h!" Bret stood smiling derisively at Ralph, his back to the rocky wall. Of a sudden his grin disappeared. He let out a loud, sharp yell of pain. Something very hard had hit him forcefully between the shoulders, sending him violently forward for a few steps at a lurching run.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SIGN OF RAM DHOUT

"WHAT hit me?" Bret regained his balance at the water's edge, thereby narrowly escaping a headlong plunge into the ocean. His startled yell had put his companions instantly on the alert.

All eyes, save Green's were now engaged in scanning the top of the cliff, high above. Green's eyes, on the contrary, were sweeping the narrow strip of beach. He bent quickly, then straightened, saying to Bret: "This is what hit you." He held up a jagged fragment of rock, twice the size of a man's hand. "It must have jarred loose from up there." He motioned upward toward a spot in the rocks, nearest to where Bret had been standing, which seemed about to crumble away. He continued, however, a sharp scanning of the top of the beetling cliff, as though not quite satisfied with his own explanation of the falling bit of rock.

"You walked like an elephant, and shook down a rock." Ralph was delighted to have another chance at Bret.

"*Is that so?* How do you know but that you did the trick? You were jumping around like a grasshopper a minute ago. Then—bing! I got whanged in the back with that rock." Bret grinningly rose to the occasion.

"The elephant and the grasshopper! *Some pair!*" chuckled Jimmy.

"It is naught. Come, let us find the pathway up the rocks." The Rajah was not seeing the funny side of the incident. He was impatient to travel again the, to him, familiar trail into the valley. "It is not far from here." He turned, and stalked on up the narrow strip of beach ahead of the Edwards' party. They followed him, more amused than concerned by the accident.

"Dandelion has nerve," Bret grumbled. "'It is naught!'" He mimicked the Hindoo. "Wait till a rock falls on him. Then we'll hear a different story."

Presently the Hindoo stopped, eyes searchingly fixed upon the cliff. "It seems the same," he said as the others came up beside him. "Look."

The adventurers obeyed the command. Their gaze following his outlining finger, they saw a kind of natural, irregular stairway, formed by the jagged outcropping of one time-worn rock above another.

"I will show you the way." With one nimble sweep of the arm the Rajah caught up his robes to the knees, fastening them securely about his waist with a heavy silk cord. He started up the ragged incline with the ease of a mountain goat, ever sure of its footing.

"By George, he *can* go it!" Farley exclaimed guardedly. "Well, I hope I can climb where

he can." He followed the Rajah's upward trail, taking the precaution to grasp each rock above him as he climbed. The remarkable old man had disdained such a method.

Chuma went next, climbing with much the same nimble prowess as his countryman. The others took up the climb, one behind another, with commendable agility. The footing grew more difficult as they neared the top, but the top was their objective. They slipped and clung and scrambled ever upward, stepping at last, in breathless triumph, upon a small natural stone platform at the top of the cliff.

They had only to step to the opposite side of the tiny platform there to behold, far below them, a sea of waving green. It was not the dense, vine-choked, thicket-blocked green of the jungle as they had known it in many different lands. The territory they glimpsed far below them was more like that of a North American forest with pleasant sunlit spaces between the trees.

"It looks great to me." Mindful of his father's command, Ralph spoke softly. "Nothing there that I can see to hinder us from making two-four time across the island. No tigers, lions, cobras, or other sweet jungle pets. Isn't that what you told us, Rajah?"

"Yes." The Rajah came out of rapt contemplation of the valley long enough to make sighing answer to Ralph's question. "It is the same; the same," he repeated half to himself.

"Lead us to it. How do we get down there?" Ralph, instead of the Rajah, was now the impatient trail-trotter.

"I think I know the way." Chuma's keen eyes had missed nothing. "See, my father" —he had kindly humored the Hindoo's whim in calling him, "my son"—"is not that the way?"

"Pearl of a son, it is," cried the pleased old man.

Bret gave a subdued snort, then tried to drown it in a make-believe cough.

True to the Rajah's previous assertion, the descent into the valley proved considerably easier than had the ascent to the top of the cliff. It was longer, and noticeably less precipitous. Half way down, the rocky character of the valley wall changed. Welcome brown streaks of hard-packed earth showed between layers of rock. Out of these streaks of earth, stunted trees and scattered clumps of bushes had sprung, thus giving the explorers an occasional support as they clambered down the rugged slope toward the valley bottom.

The Rajah's sandaled feet were the first to find the green, well-grassed level of the valley. One after another the rest of the little line of men came mutely up beside him. As far as they could see, on three sides of them, stretched the pleasant forest. Viewed at close range, it seemed more heavily-grown than it had appeared to be from the top of the cliff. There was a plainer suggestion of the jungle in luxuri-

ously-growing vine and bush than they had glimpsed at first sight. Yet it was not the familiar, tropical vegetation of India, or even that of the South Seas at which they were now gazing.

"Not a coconut palm in sight; no banyans, either." Ralph's prudently low-pitched comment sounded almost loudly upon the tranquil stillness of the landscape before them. "No sign of monkeys, and I can't hear any confounded old insects buzzing. Queer, isn't it, since this island's right in the heart of the tropical belt. It's cool here, too."

"The climate here seems temperate. Green's theory of an ocean current off the west side of the island is, no doubt, sound," declared Mr. Edwards. "We may go a little further in surmising it to be a cold current. It would account for the seemingly temperate climatic condition on the island, and also for the absence of flora and fauna common to the more torrid belts."

"It seems the same, and, yet, is it the same?" Off, a few feet to the right of the group, the Rajah was paying no attention to Malcolm Edwards' brief lecture on natural history. He was, instead, conducting a troubled monologue of his own, accompanied by a nonplused shaking of his turbaned head.

"What's the good word, Oom Bossy Edwards? Can't we trek a little way?" Ralph's impatience to be moving on was again tugging strongly at the leash.

"Yes. We may as well begin breaking our trail across the island. I'll ask the Rajah if he wishes to play guide. He may prefer that one of us head the van."

"I will walk first. Yes, that is the duty of my mission." The Rajah ceased his monologue to reply to the jewel man's question. "You have my permission to walk behind me with the Sahib Arthur. The excellent Sahib Green shall walk last with my son. These three youths had best walk between we five who have greater prudence and wisdom."

"Bing! That was a hot shot." Ralph's arm went up, as though dodging a blow. Nevertheless, he and Bret and Jimmy good-humoredly joined in the subdued wave of laughter that went up at their expense.

With an imperative "Come," the Rajah started off across the long-grassed level at a brisk stride. It was well for him that his back was turned toward the adventurers. His cherished turban in combination with his long, lean brown limbs, and turned-up robes made him a figure more ludicrous than respect-inspiring. A series of cheerful snorts and chuckles rose from among the adventurers which they suppressed with more or less difficulty, as, in the formation ordered by the old man, they took up the trail behind him.

It was not a hard trail to follow, though in plain stretches upon which the sun poured strongly down, the coarse, broad-bladed grass

stood waist deep. After having passed through the first one of these high-grassed stretches the adventurers stopped by the way long enough to provide themselves with sturdy snake-sticks cut from the low-hanging branches of a tough-limbed tree.

"There is naught to fear from snakes." The Rajah viewed the precautionary operation with a frown. "My Rajah and I found none here; no, we found none."

"We have become used to carrying them with us in our travels, my father," Chuma placated. "We like better to have them now."

"I have no objection to them. You have my permission to carry them." The Rajah waved his consent grandly, then turned and loped on ahead again.

"This blamed grass'll throw a fellow down if he doesn't watch his step," Jimmy complained. He had barely saved himself from pitching forward on his face as the long, entangling blades wrapped themselves tightly about his right ankle.

Bending, he jerked the clinging grass rope free of his foot. He pulled up a large tuft of grass in the operation and threw it off to the left of the trail with vexed force.

About to hurry on, Green and Farley were all but walking on his heels, Jimmy stopped short again as a dread, familiar sound smote upon his ears. The sound brought both Green and Chuma, also, to a sudden standstill. All

three had instantly recognized it as the sibilant, spiteful hiss of the cobra, enraged, and ready for battle.

"It's over in there," shouted Jimmy. "I must have pasted the blamed snake with that grass tuft." Quick as a flash he drew his revolver and fired into the grass at the spot he had just designated. A black, hooded head, swollen with rage, erected itself above the waving grass.

Chuma's revolver barked. The black, unsightly head disappeared. Instantaneous with its disappearance, Chuma fired again. He and his companions then went cautiously toward the spot where the violent agitation of the long grass proclaimed the cobra to have been hit by one, perhaps all three, bullets.

"We did for it." The cobra, now a gyrating mass of coils, thicker than a man's wrist, was threshing in its death agony. "I was afraid maybe we'd only winged it. I kept watching the grass for fear it might make a get-away." He took deliberate aim at the reptile's hideous, fanged head, and shot it off. "That settles you, old poison-pack," he said with satisfaction. "I wonder how many more of your kind are loose on this island."

The sound of shots had brought the others back over the trail, running. All except the Rajah. He paused half impatiently on the trail, making no effort to join in the rush.

"What in the name of Pete's happening back

here?" Ralph called out curiously. "Good night! Smash goes my hope of a snakeless Paradise. Talk about noise. You made enough with your shooting. The air's so still here your shots sounded like cannon firing. You're excused, though. You ripped up the air in a good cause. Believe me, the blamed grass will get a good beating from me, from now on, with every step I trek. Old poison puff there has a mate, probably, sliding around in the high grass. Gee, it looks as though a cobra can thrive most any old place, except, maybe, the North Pole! Ugh!" Ralph gave the dead cobra a contemptuous poke with his snake stick. "Six feet of sudden death put out of business."

"This will give the Rajah a jolt," Farley said as they turned away from the dead reptile and continued on to where the Hindoo stood waiting for them.

"Betcha it will," Green agreed.

As they neared the Hindoo, he raised his arms above his head with a sudden dramatic gesture. "Tell me nothing," he piped shrilly. "I know all. You have killed a cobra. Things here are not the same. Now will trouble begin."

"Not yet. We've just put six feet of trouble on the village dump heap," Ralph cheerily assured.

"You understand not of what I speak," the old man rebuked with gloomy dignity. His gaunt features had clouded. He stared across the grassy space, his eyes full of anxious con-

cern. "When my Rajah and I were last on the island, there were then no cobras here. You have seen the sign of Ram Dhout."

"What do you mean, Rajah?" Malcolm Edwards' eyes met Green's with lightning significance. The sailor's opinion of the Island of Sapphires, "too good to be true," had instantly recurred to them both.

"Ram Dhout has been here," the Hindoo's tone was darkly positive. "When? Who can say? He is not here now. No one but he could have left his sign in Calcutta for the Sahib Arthur. He will soon be here. He will be here," he repeated with somber stress. "You were wise, Sahib Edwards, in saying we had best walk softly. Perhaps, already, the island is cursed with his murderous allies. They are here for the sapphires. In some dark way, my Rajah must have been visited by Ram Dhout while he slept, and his secret thus learned by his enemy."

"Oh, cheer up, Rajah," consoled Ralph, sympathetic eyes on the old man's troubled face. "The cobra the fellows shot to pieces may have been skating around on the island for years. Rajah Ashim Dhon and you probably missed seeing it. Maybe it was the only, lonely cob on the island."

"You have a kind heart, but you speak heedlessly." The old man waved away Ralph's kindly supposition. "Ram Dhout has placed here the cobra the sahibs shot. How many more

of them burden the island we shall yet discover. You have my permission to cut me a snake stick. I must be prepared."

"What do you know about that?" breathed Bret as the Hindoo wheeled and loped off after Chuma who had already hurried to a neighboring tree to cut the desired stick.

"I'm afraid he may be right about it," Green said soberly. "The snake we just shot looks like a sure-enough Asiatic cobra. You fellows have seen the African cobra, the ringhals. You know the difference between the two varieties. This Ram Dhout was once a snake charmer, it seems. You might expect him to do some such trick. I mean, he may have purposely scattered cobras over the island. He and his pals, if he has any pals here, as the Rajah seems to believe, wouldn't mind the snakes. But strangers here, like us—— You see my point."

"Dear old Rammey doesn't know us," Ralph said scornfully. "Of all the fiendish tricks! Well—he's due to get a shock, and lose his little home pets in the bargain. He's lost one already."

"There's only one thing we can do, keep on going, and find out for ourselves what all this flurry amounts to," Farley asserted stoutly. "How much further are we to trek to-day, Mr. Edwards?"

"Not more than a mile further. We've gone over a mile now. There has seemed to be little change in the character of the landscape as

we've traveled. To-morrow, I'd suggest we bring along a couple of sickles and hack away the grass as we go. We've several in the hold, and have found them useful more than once for that very purpose. Our objective is the other end of the island. We'll win it, eventually." The jewel man's face registered stubborn purpose, not to be easily turned aside by the shadow of danger.

"Here comes his Highness. He's laying things off to Chuma to beat the band. Something's got his goat." Jimmy was quizzically eyeing the approaching pair. He noted that one of the Rajah's hands was held behind his back. He was gabbling querulously to Chuma in Hindustanee.

"I have spoken truly," he shrilled triumphantly. "See, under the bushes, my son found this." He jerked his hand from behind him, dangling before the eyes of the group an object attached to a broken string of woven grass. It was a good-sized, half-worn sandal.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HIDDEN MARKSMAN

"A SANDAL! Things are beginning to stir!" Green took the sandal from the Rajah's outstretched hand and began looking it over. "Trust Chuma to dig up something special. Some find, old Sharp-eyes."

"I found it but by chance, Sahib Green. I had stooped to take a thorn from one of my own sandals when I saw this." Chuma had chosen to go on the hike in the short, comfortable tunic and sandals of his native country. Corduroys and high-laced boots were not for him when in the jungle.

"It goes to prove there is somebody besides this gang and the birds on the island. This sandal hasn't lain long under the bushes, either. If it had, it would be pretty well rotted away," was Green's shrewd deduction.

"I believe it has been left under the bushes within the past hour," Chuma said.

"You think we have been trailed?" was the jewel man's quick question.

"Yes; perhaps not far. The shots may have brought some one here, to hide under the bushes and watch us. Or, it may be——" Chuma paused uncertainly. "We thought the rock that struck Sahib Bret broke off from the cliff," he went on. "Perhaps some one was watching us

from above at that time, and then threw down the rock. Still, it is strange that——" Chuma stopped again, frowning.

"I get you," nodded Green. "I'd say, too, that a fellow posted up on the cliff top to do us harm would certainly have picked a rock large enough to crash one, or, maybe, all of us."

"It was too big to suit me." Bret ruefully rubbed his right shoulder which the fragment of rock had bruised considerably.

"The cobra was the sign of Ram Dhout. The sandal but confirms it," the Rajah broke in impatiently. "Tell our brothers, my son, what we have resolved to do." He motioned imperatively toward Chuma.

"My father wishes you to return to the yacht at once. He and I will go with you, but, tonight under cover of the darkness, we will row ashore and cross the island. We——"

"What's the matter with you, Chuma?" Arthur Farley whirled upon his man, reproachful vexation in his tones. "You should know better than spring any such wild scheme on us. The Rajah must take us for a bunch of ninnies. What are we supposed to do while you two do all the danger stunts? Hang over the rail and wait for you to come back."

"Nothing doing," came emphatically from Ralph.

"I can't see it that way, either," supplemented Green.

Bret and Jimmy set up a united forceful protest.

Chuma lifted his brown hands in a half-humorous despair at the storm of opposition the Rajah's high-handed proposal had raised.

"Softly, my brothers." A curious dignity vibrated in the old Hindoo's high tones which had its effect upon the nettled adventurers. "We are of one blood, my son, and I. The Hindoos knew the jungle when the world was young. We know it, even as they knew it. I know my Rajah's island. Do you know it? Who else among you, save my son, can steal through the night like a shadow. Even the excellent Sahib Green can not surpass my son in this. It is a mission for my son and me to perform. We shall return with the coming dawn. Yes, we shall return. Gainsay us not, for we have agreed to do this, even in the face of your displeasure. When we shall have returned you will then know what lies yonder, at the door of the gravel plain."

"I hate to have to admit it, but you are right, Rajah," Green declared in a tone of chagrin. "Just the same, it's a tough old pill to swallow."

"You are a brave man, Rajah. I take off my hat to you." Malcolm Edwards, hitherto silent, swept his helmet from his head, bowing with sincere admiration to the invincible old man. In the same instant the others bared their heads in honoring the Rajah.

"Now, you are indeed my brothers," the Hindoo cried out delightedly. "Have no fear for us. With the first light of the dawn, have the launch at the shore, ready for us. Let us turn back now. By doing thus we may puzzle the enemy, which will be excellent for us."

Somewhat reluctantly the adventurers complied with the Rajah's request, though it was not yet noon. Returning over the trail they had broken, they went more slowly, beating aside the long grass with their snake sticks as they trekked. This time they walked, single file, the Rajah at the head of the line, Chuma bringing up the rear. The two Hindoos acted as lookouts, and took no part, consequently, in the grass-beating.

It remained to sharp-eyed Jimmy, however, to put excitement into the uneventful hike back to the beach. His sudden exclamation of, "Look, there goes a bear!" brought the line to a quick standstill. He pointed off among the trees at the left of the trail.

"Never were there bears on this island." The Rajah regarded Jimmy with skeptical eyes.

"It was a bear; a big dark brown bear," Jimmy persisted. "It was running like sixty. I couldn't see its head, but I saw its shaggy hind legs. It was going toward the beach, too."

"I caught a flash of something moving among the trees over there." Malcolm Edwards now rallied to Jimmy's support. "I'd have mis-

taken it for a shadow cast by the sun if Jimmy hadn't called out."

"Better a bear than a cobra," Farley said lightly. "It's going to take more than a few bears to drive us off my island."

"Strange it made no noise in running. Bears are lumbering, clumsy brutes, though they *are* swift runners. Maybe we'll get a shot at it, later, since it was heading for the beach," Green said.

"It may have a cave somewhere along the cliff. We are not more than a quarter of a mile from the rocks, I should judge," Farley commented.

The line took up the hike beachward again, arriving presently at the point of the cliff at which the ascent out of the valley began.

"It's going to be harder climbing up these rocks than it was coming down." Ralph was taking speculative inventory of the cliff side. "We came down partly at a slide. Some of those rocks are slippery propositions."

"We'll save time, coming and going over the cliff, by using a rope ladder," was the sailor's happy suggestion. "There are plenty of them in the hold. Rope enough of them together into one long ladder, and it will do the trick. One of us can go up, secure it, then lower it for the rest of the gang, going up. Going down, last man down can unfasten it, drop it and slide down afterward."

"A good idea, Stanley. That spur of rock at

the top of the cliff will hold the ladder securely, coming down." The jewel man raised an indicating finger toward the spur of rock above. "I daresay we can find one as good for our purpose on the other side of the platform."

Listening to their leader, eyes fixed on the spur of rock above them, the adventurers became briefly off their guard. In that moment something whizzed past Green's right ear, and through the top of the Rajah's imposing turban. Came a clinking sound as the swift-flying missile struck against a flat stone at Chuma's feet. Stooping, he snatched it from the stone on which it lay, with a soft ejaculation. Next second his revolver was out, and aimed toward a neighboring thicket. "Fire, Sahibs, one and all," he breathed. "Fire into the thicket."

Eight revolvers came into quick use. A united report rent the quiet air. Followed the frightened chirping and light whir of wings as the startled forest birds took flight.

"Again, Sahibs." Once more Chuma's revolver led in the firing.

"Oh, come on, let's rush the thicket," begged Ralph.

"No, Sahib Ralph. We should find no one there," Chuma said.

"We'd find a dead one, maybe," argued Ralph. "Then we'd *know* surely what kind of man proposition we were up against. Savages, I'll guess, by the look of that dart." Chuma still held the hidden enemy's missile in his left

hand. "Maybe a bunch of 'em have cached themselves in the thicket."

"No, Sahib Ralph. I believe there was but one. He threw the dart, then ran. I feel positive of it."

"Humph! Then what was the use of firing a second round into the thicket?" Ralph had become a trifle nettled at Chuma's, to him, mysterious tactics.

"To make him afraid," was Chuma's calm response. "Though he ran, still he could hear the shots, and know his danger."

"Let me see the blamed dart." Ralph reached out to take it from Chuma's light clasp. "Do not touch the tip of it. It is probably poisoned," Chuma warned. He placed the other end of the stone dart carefully in Ralph's hand.

"What is the answer to all this, Chuma?" Green was eyeing Chuma with curious interest. "You seem to know a lot that we don't."

"My son understands much. So do I." The Rajah glanced sourly up from a rueful examination of his jeweled turban which he now held in both hands. His revolver again reposed in his robe pocket. His precious turban now had two neat holes in the crown where the dart had torn through the silk.

"It is an East Indian dart, Sahib Green, of a kind used very long ago by the hill men. My father had one of these in a collection of weapons which he had once made. It has been steeped in snake venom, I believe."

"It means this. The snake charmers, who have ever clung to Ram Dhout, are here. They are wild fellows whom he dragged from the hills into his service, murderers and robbers. The dart is the final proof I need to inform me that he has cursed my Rajah's island with his miserable presence. He is not yet here, but he will be here soon; he will be here soon."

"Is Ram Dhout a hill man, too?" Farley asked. "It takes a hill man to handle those confounded border savages."

The Rajah's eyes met Farley's with an expression of mysterious conviction. "No; Ram Dhout is a Tibetan."

Farley emitted a surprised whistle. "Then he must be a bad proposition. The Tibetans are a murderous lot. Explorers have found it out to their sorrow. Tibet is run by the Lamas. They call themselves priests of the temple," he ended ironically.

"Tibet is a land of cruelty," the old Hindoo affirmed. "The Lamas are not true followers of Buddha, the Good. They are ignorant, superstitious fanatics, who rob their worshipers, and keep the land in dreadful bondage. Long ago, I traced the history of Ram Dhout, little by little. It went back to Tibet. This is not the time to tell you of it. You shall hear it after I have brought him to punishment for his crimes." The Rajah became suddenly silent and abstracted.

"If Ram Dhout is really on his way here, he

will have his own troubles trying to land on this island." Green's jaws set themselves with belligerent stubbornness. "He'll have us, and the *Swallow's* crew, too, to reckon with. We'd be within our rights. You own the island, Farley."

"I'll exercise my authority to the limit to keep him off it," Farley made resolute promise.

"Don't you think, Mr. Edwards, the time has come to take the crew into our confidence about our purpose on the island? They're straight, to the last man. You know we have planned to share with them on whatever shiners we may find. It's human nature to long for riches. They'll feel better to be in our confidence, and fight harder, if it should come to a fight, for having interests of their own at stake," Green ended significantly.

"We will call them together this evening in the cabin, and tell them," the jewel man made hearty reply. "The *Swallow's* safekeeping will be entirely up to them, whenever we are on the island. We shall go on with our expedition across it to the gravel plain, unless the Rajah and Chuma bring back word in the morning that we are hopelessly outnumbered by Ram Dhout's choice collection of rascals."

"That would be a crusher," groaned Ralph. "It would be our first flunk on a jewel prospect."

"We might seem to flunk, but only temporarily." Farley's racial stubbornness against

defeat was rapidly rising. "This island is mine. It's going to stay mine. If we should find it too hazardous a job for our crowd to swing, we'd draw off. When we return"—he paused meaningly—"it would be on an English cruiser, flying the British flag, and with enough fighting men aboard to run Ram Dhout and his rascals into the sea."

CHAPTER XV

PREPARING FOR TROUBLE

NINE o'clock that evening brought the blackness of a moonless night, under cover of which Chuma and the Rajah were to be rowed ashore. In the cabin, behind drawn shades, the Rajah was completing the last touches to his disguise, surrounded by an interested group of watchers. He was attired in a brown linen tunic, borrowed of Chuma, and about his waist was strapped Ralph's leather gun belt. He had donned the black wig, worn from the hotel to the yacht on the night of the adventurers' departure from Calcutta, but it was now clipped close, with merely an edge of black hair showing beneath a fitted brown silk cap which resembled a night cap. He was also decked out in the black mustache and a pair of two-inch-long sideburns. The latter, seemingly, altered the shape of his face, changing its expression of dignified benignity to one of sinister cunning.

Chuma had changed his white tunic for one of dark color. He wore a gun belt, but had elected to go on the detail bareheaded. Impatient to be off on the night errand, the Rajah had little to say. Respecting his nervous silence, the Adventure Boys tactfully reserved

their comments until they should have seen the brave old man and Chuma over the side and on their way to shore. Green and Farnham were to row them ashore in one of the *Swallow's* dingys. Presently the boat was noiselessly lowered and the little shore party slipped away from the yacht's side into the black night.

In a little less than an hour, Green and Farnham returned to report that they had landed the two Hindoos, unattended by any disturbing incidents, and had accompanied them as far as the point of ascent of the cliff. For a brief half hour the adventurers gave themselves over to a confidential discussion of their present forbidding situation. Later, Malcolm Edwards summoned the crew to the cabin, there to carry out Green's earlier suggestion.

Since "quiet" had become the watchword on the *Swallow* the delighted sailors were obliged to keep their grateful enthusiasm in prudent check. Their beaming faces and happy, if low-toned, "thank you's" were a plain indication of their appreciative loyalty to the adventurers and their project.

The first gray sign of dawn found the adventurers up and awaiting the return of the scouting party. Green and Farnham had already gone shoreward in the launch, ready to pick up Chuma and the Rajah at a moment's notice. On the yacht their comrades had posted themselves with rifles at various points along the rail which commanded the beach. It was

hard to judge in what manner the two Hindoos might return.

In the midst of the tense watch on the cliff-side which the adventurers were keeping, the brown-capped head of the Rajah suddenly appeared at the top of the cliff. Chuma came into sight directly afterward, the pair making the steep descent with visible signs of weariness.

"Thank goodness, they got away with it!" Green exclaimed in a tone of relief. "No one chasing them, that I can see." Standing up in the launch, he had been keeping a close watch on the cliff top while the scouts were descending the rocks to the beach.

"It is well with us, but we are weary," were the Rajah's first words as he made for the launch.

"Maybe we're not glad to see you back, O.K." Green helped the tired old veteran into the launch. Chuma bounded in after him and the launch got into speedy flight under Farnham's practiced hands.

A jubilant cheer greeted the scouts as they came over the rail.

"Give me a bowl of rice," the Rajah demanded before his feet had hardly touched deck.

Five minutes later he was hungrily eating rice and enjoying long drafts of water while Chuma was equally busy with crisp fried bacon, rolls, jam and coffee. Green had ordered breakfast to be brought to the cabin where the adventurers might listen to the report of the two

Hindoos in privacy. They were impatient to hear what had befallen the weary scouts, but put a curb upon their impatience until the two tired men should have eaten and rested. Alone, Chuma would have related his adventures while he ate. The Rajah, however, took his time, Chuma deferring to him.

"It is as I suspected." The Rajah straightened up from his emptied rice bowl with an air of triumph. "The creatures of Ram Dhout are on the island, and await the coming of their master. They have made a camp in front of the high peak. Chuma and I have seen them, counted them, and heard them talk."

"*The high peak!*" broke in surprise from Malcolm Edwards. "You mean you and Chuma have hiked to the high peak and back since you left us last night? You amaze me."

"Yes. I knew the way in the darkness. We went fast, halting not. It was not yet the hour of one when we came near their camp. A bright fire burned near the rocks. Some of them lay near it, asleep, but there were four of them sitting at one side of the fire, playing a game of chance. We flattened ourselves to the earth and crept as near to the fire as we might by keeping in the shadow of the rocks. We came near enough to them to hear their voices distinctly. Three of those who sat near the fire were known to me as snake charmers of the plazas. Only one man of the four was different. He sat as a giant among them, very tall and

strong. I knew him for a Tibetan. Those who slept we saw not so plainly, but Chuma knew them for hill men of Upper Burma. Is it not so, my son?"

"Yes, my father." To his comrades he said: "They were border men, low fellows, with fierce, brutal faces. Some of them had dahs (broad, two-edged knives). They slept with a hand clasping the handle. We could not see whether, or not, they had rifles. Three of the men near the fire had dahs. The tall one wore a gun belt with a revolver in one side of it. A dah was stuck in the other side."

"You have my permission to be now silent, my son. Let me speak." The Rajah showed a childish inclination to do the talking.

"Yes, my father." Chuma subsided with an indulgent smile which went a flashing round of the little circle about the breakfast table.

"These fellows await the return of Ram Dhout with little patience," the Rajah resumed. "They seem not to know their master's plans. He has promised them riches, but they are dissatisfied, and have no liking for the island. Last night they were grumbling that there could be no riches in a place which had nothing but grass and rocks. The Tibetan said nothing. He may know more of Ram Dhout's secrets than the others, since Ram Dhout is a Tibetan, too. Chuma doubts if they know yet of our coming to the island. Their talk among themselves was as though they were alone on it.

They spoke of one of their number who had not then returned to their camp."

"He must have been the fellow who was trailing us," Ralph put in quickly. "Maybe our bullets found a mark. We'd better go ashore to-day and search the thicket."

"I have already done this," Chuma said. "It took me but a moment or two as we came out of the valley. I found no one there. When the three men spoke of the one who had not returned the Tibetan scowled and grew angry. He seemed to blame the others for letting this one go away from the camp. We heard him say: 'If he comes not back you will have the master to reckon with. You know what he will do.' The three all began saying at once they were not to blame because the other had run away."

"Tell our brothers what else we saw, my son." The Rajah had evidently changed his mind about doing most of the talking. He had slumped down in his chair and was nodding sleepily.

"We saw a row of baskets set against the rocks at the left of the fire. The lids were fastened. There was a pile of tree limbs near one of the baskets. One of the men by the fire went over to it for more fuel. He stumbled against the basket. We heard a long hiss, such as only a cobra can give. He spoke to it in Hindustanee, and it stopped hissing."

"Maybe it was the cob that got away, and

they were talking about it instead of about one of their gang," offered Jimmy.

"It would have to be some cob to lose a sandal, or throw a dart," Green reminded him. "It's probable, though, one of the snakes has worked itself out of a basket, and vamosed."

"Old Mister Dhout'll never see that poison-pack again," Bret said flippantly. "Glad he keeps his snake den in his camp. It'll save us worry and gun fodder. Did you run into any cobs last night, Chuma?"

"No; we had little thought of them." Jungle-bred, neither Hindoo had regarded possible night encounter with a cobra as a special peril.

"Ram Dhout has a use for his cobras, or they would not be in his camp in baskets," the Rajah aroused himself to say darkly. "He will yet turn them loose upon us. We counted fifteen baskets."

"Fifteen baskets, and how many men? You haven't told us that, as yet, Rajah."

Farley's anxious reminder brought the old man jerkily upright in his chair.

"I am a drowsy old fool," he accused himself disgustedly. "I should have spoken of this at first. We counted twelve men. The odds seem small against us." Now wide awake, he sat regarding the circle of men with a curiously hopeful expression.

"What do you say, Edwards?" Farley's energetic tone made his meaning plain.

"To-morrow morning at sun-up we'll start

across the island," the jewel man answered with spirit. "There is no time to be lost. We must take possession of that camp at once. We have the advantage of being better armed than these fellows seem to be. If we can take them by surprise, the odds will be in our favor."

"Suppose we capture the whole works? What are we going to do with that bunch of wild hyenas?" Ralph demanded.

"There's only one thing we can do. Hike them across the island to the yacht, and tie them up in the hold," was his father's prompt reply. "Then we'll stay on the *Swallow* and wait for Ram Dhout. He will come next in the big clean-up. Let him win past us, if he can. I can't see it. It means a fight, but we've the right to help Farley defend his property. We are going to do it."

CHAPTER XVI

UNDER COVER

CONSIDERATION for the Rajah, who was in need of rest, alone deterred Malcolm Edwards and his flock from making the battle hike across the island a night expedition. As it was, the adventurers resigned themselves to the hazard of a daylight hike until they should have reached a point, a little off the trail, and about two miles distant from the enemy camp. There, the Rajah assured them, they would be led by him to a nearby hiding place which would shelter them until nightfall. Unless the absent member of Ram Dhout's band should have returned to camp in the meantime and apprised his comrades of the adventurers' presence on the island, the Rajah was of the opinion that the dissatisfied hill men would continue to hang about their camp. They were a lazy, gambling lot, he said, and not likely to be found roaming over the island. Unless the dart thrower had, meanwhile, returned to the band, there was strong probability that they might be caught off their guard.

All that day, while the Rajah slept off his fatigue the busy stir of preparation for the warlike expedition went steadily forward. The *Swallow's* crew were also occupied with active

preparation on board in the event that a strange ship might suddenly appear on the horizon, headed for the channel and trouble. Green had issued orders to his men to hold the *Swallow's* position in the channel against all comers. They were not to open fire upon any ship that might appear, flying the flag of hostility, unless the crew of that ship should first open fire upon the *Swallow*. In such event they were to defend themselves.

"Don't let any of the boys over the side, either in the launch or for a swim while we are away, Dearborn," Green charged the mate just before the expedition to the island embarked in the launch to go ashore. "Accidents will happen, you know. I can't afford to lose a man, either on shore, or to the sharks. The water around here harbors plenty of them. We've seen several good-sized sharks from the launch."

"Don't I know the water's thick with 'em around here." The mate wagged his head in quick affirmation. "The first day we were here when your party went ashore, Cox thought he'd like to go over the side for a swim. He'd hardly touched the water until he saw one. It came right after him. He got away while it was turning over to grab him. It gave us all a chill. You can trust us to stick to the yacht, Mr. Green," he asserted loyally, "no matter what comes."

Just before dawn the next morning the ex-

peditionists were rowed ashore in the two dinghies by Farnham and Cox. This time they were burdened, though not heavily, with sufficient rations to last them for three days, packed in knapsacks, slung across their shoulders. Besides the ammunition they carried in their gun belts, each man had an extra box of shells, stowed away in a convenient pocket. They had decided against the carrying of rifles, preferring their revolvers as less cumbersome and more useful in quick action. The few cooking utensils they deemed strictly necessary had been divided among them. Bret carried the coffeepot, Jimmy the small alcohol lamp on which to make coffee and fry bacon. Green toted a light-weight frying pan and the camp flashlight, and Ralph the alcohol blocks which furnished fuel for the lamp. Farley's share was the camp's collapsible water pail, and the camp hatchet, while Mr. Edwards took charge of a bundle of thin tough rope, in itself significant of victory. The adventurers had brought along the rattan snake sticks, heavily loaded of head, which they had had made and had found considerable use for while in Upper Burma. Just before they should arrive at the enemy camp, the sticks were to be bundled together, and cached, so as to leave their hands free for quick action.

Their hurried dash against the enemy forbade their stopping long enough at the cliff to try out Green's ladder-adjusting plan over the

rocks. They climbed up the cliff in the semi-darkness of approaching dawn, descending into the valley with the first wan light of day. Chuma and the Rajah flitted on ahead of the van, often disappearing briefly from their sight, presently to reappear and wave their followers onward on the trail. The hush of dawn in a lonely place hung like a cloak over the island, stirred only by plaintive, waking bird calls and rustling leaves. A light breeze blew pleasantly in the faces of the line of silent men as they forged steadily ahead toward their objective.

Long before noon they had reached the point off the trail where the Rajah had promised them a secret hiding place. He led them down a short steep incline into a deep depression in the valley floor which formed a natural pocket, overhung on all sides with trails of luxuriantly-growing, tough-fibered vines. Their green, running tendrils festooned the trunks and lower limbs of the trees and carpeted the ground.

Entering the green pocket, which looked to be about fifteen feet wide, and twenty-five feet long, the adventurers paused for a canny inspection of the snug little nook. The Rajah, however, continued across the pocket floor to its upper side. He halted in front of a vine-wrapped formation of rock which jutted sharply out from the pocket wall, and began trotting back and forth under the rocky projection, his hands busily dragging at the tangled vines.

"What's Dandelion up to?" muttered Bret in Ralph's ear.

"Ask him? Dished if I can guess what's on his mind," Ralph replied as he continued curiously to watch the Hindoo.

"Come on. He's wig-wagging us. Something's stirring." Stanley Green hurried toward the Rajah, who had now stepped out from under the rocky shelf and was imperiously beckoning the group forward.

"I have found it again," the old man greeted. "The vines have grown over it." He darted under the shelf again, pointing into the tangled masses of green. "Cut them here, very near the earth, but tear them not away. Leave them as a curtain. You will see."

"By George, a cave!" Farley exclaimed softly. "Pretty neat, upon my word!"

Green's sharp clasp knife was already in use. Following the Rajah's instruction he was shearing through the tough-fibered vines with skillful precision. Farley got out his own knife and began helping the sailor. Together, they severed the green-leaved trails, low-down, while their companions looked on in breathless expectation.

"Done." Green presently straightened up and began pushing the severed vines carefully aside. A dark opening revealed itself to the watching group drawn up behind him and Farley. The flash of his pocket light into it showed a hard-packed earthy cavern, irregularly cir-

cular in shape, and extending well back under the shelving rock.

"It is the same," the Rajah sighed contentedly. "It was thus my Rajah and I found it, years ago, on a day when we wandered for pleasure over the island. It is an odd-appearing cavern. We wondered, then, if it might not have been the lair of a cave man when the earth was young."

"It's a jolly good hide-out for us. We ought to tender pre-historic man a vote of thanks," laughed Farley. "Let's have a look into it."

Green had already pushed through the green loosened curtain, stepping upon the hard earth floor of the circular cave. His light played continuously upon the floor, and the walls, revealing nothing but a silent little space, untenanted by scorpions, spiders or snakes.

"We had best cache ourselves, now, and stay cached until dark," was Malcolm Edwards' advice to his comrades. "We'll have to lie low till then and do little, or no, talking."

The expeditionists speedily stowed themselves in the cave. It held them comfortably, though they could not stand erect in it. When they were all in it, Green and Chuma slipped outside again for a critical survey of the vine curtain. They soon returned with the cheering information that the concealing vines showed no sign from without of having been severed.

Then began a long weary wait, more tiresome because it had to be made in silence. They

would have been in complete darkness except for the aid of the camp flashlight. Green had placed it at one side of the leafy curtain and had masked it so that its light could not be detected from the outside. The Rajah had promptly curled up in the back of the cave for a nap. His companions, however, felt no inclination even to doze briefly.

At two o'clock the adventurers ate a silent luncheon of sandwiches. They dared not make coffee for fear its odor might be wafted outside, thus revealing their hiding place to possible scouts of the enemy. They had finished eating when Chuma rose to his feet and said softly: "Sahib Edwards it will be best for me to go on ahead, alone, and try to see what our enemies are doing."

"You place me in a hard position, Chuma. You are your own man, you know, free to do as you please. Still, the risk is great, so great I hate to say 'Yes.' If you feel that you must go, one of us should go with you. Yet, that might merely hamper you, and bring down disaster upon you from these cut-throats." The jewel man regarded Chuma with troubled eyes.

"I shall return safely, Sahib Edwards, then you will be glad you let me go," Chuma said with quiet confidence. "Now I will steal outside for a look around. At four o'clock I will start for the high peak. I shall return here by eight. It will not be dark enough for us to leave here and go on our way before half past

eight. Do not waken him," he cautioned, smiling toward the sleeping Rajah. "He might forbid me to go."

With this, Chuma slipped like a shadow through the vine curtain to the accompaniment of a soft stir of whispered comments from his comrades.

"I'd like to go with him," Green's eyes gleamed, "but he wouldn't like it. It's a fact that he can put it all over us, scouting. It's hard to swallow, though," he ended with a short laugh.

"You needn't feel bad about it, Green. You could get away with it. I'd back you to win, same as I do Chuma," Farley consoled. "I couldn't swing it, though."

"Oh, go on. Of course you could," Green stoutly asserted.

The noiseless return of Chuma, soon after, into the cave brought the attention of the group to bear upon him.

"All seems well," he reported. "I have been as far as the trail and went a little way along it." He dropped down cross-legged on the cave floor, and silence again settled upon the group.

Four o'clock finally came and Chuma took a shadow-like departure.

"I'm going to play lookout for a change." Green rose, went to the concealing curtain, cautiously parting the vines a little. "I hear running water," he presently whispered. "There's a spring close by. My water bottle's half

empty. Guess I'll hunt the spring and fill it. If everything is O.K. I'll come back for the water pail. You fellows can fill your water bottles from it, if you need to refill 'em."

He disappeared adroitly through the parted vines, stepping almost as lightly in his boot-shod feet as had Chuma in sandals. It seemed a long time to the anxious company before he reappeared among them.

"What is it, Stanley?" Malcolm Edwards had instantly read in Green's steady features something of special import.

"There's a dead man over by the spring." Green's voice vibrated with intense excitement, "and this is what killed him." The fingers of his left hand unclosed from about a familiar-appearing object.

"Good night!" Ralph vented his favorite expression of surprise. A general startled murmur went up from the others.

"He's a big fellow. Well over six feet, I'd say, and a yellow-brown color. He's not been dead long. His face is puffed up, like that of a man who has died of snake bite. The dart was stuck right in the middle of his forehead. It's evident this dart has had the point soaked in snake venom. I gave him a quick once-over. He had a gun belt with a pair of bum revolvers in it, and a long knife. He must have been on our trail when the dart hit him. Whoever the dart thrower may be, he must have had it in for the dead man down there, too. There may be

another gang beside Ram Dhout's on the island. This dead one answers the description the Rajah and Chuma gave us of the big man who sat by the fire in Ram Dhout's camp. It's too bad to disturb *him,*" Green glanced at the sleeping Rajah, "but I need him to come with me and identify this dead one, if he can."

"I'll waken him. I shall go with you, Stanley." The jewel man went over to the sleeping Rajah and gently shook his arm.

"I am awake. What do you desire, my brother." The old Hindoo had awakened, instant with the light pressure upon his arm. A few terse sentences from Mr. Edwards put him in touch with the situation. "Let us go." With one of his agile movements, he was at the curtain and out of the cave.

Green led the way to the spring which was located a few yards below the pocket. The dead man lay on his side, arms and legs drawn up as though he had died in great agony.

"It is the Tibetan." The Rajah had instantly identified his man as the one he had seen on the night previous in the enemy camp.

"We thought it might be," Green nodded. "He may have been killed by one of his own gang," he kept up a wary survey about him as he spoke. "It's a leading question whether the dart thrower was trailing the Tibetan to kill him, or whether he was trailing us. We'd best be moving on. Avoid being a dart board, if you can, happens to be a good motto for us. It

seems hard to deny even an enemy decent burial, but I'd not advise stopping now to bury him."

"No; let the Tibetan dog lie there," grumpily ordered the Rajah. "We shall do well to return to the cave and remain in it till dark. Then this dart thrower will have no certain target for his venomous arrows."

"Better not come back here again with the water pail, Green," counseled the jewel man. "There are too many good hiding places between here and the cave for this killer. It's beginning to grow shadowy in the pocket. It will be dark here, long before it's dark over there." He waved a hand toward the trail.

The trio of men turned their faces toward the cave, keeping a bright lookout as they hurried toward it. Arriving without mishap at the shelving rock that overhung the entrance to the cave, Malcolm Edwards motioned the Rajah to go into the cave first. Pausing to speak to the sailor who had halted just beyond the rocky shelf for a final reconnoiter, something whizzed past his head, almost brushing his left cheek. In the next instant a long, hairy brown arm shot down from overhead. He felt a grinding, torturing pressure upon his left shoulder which lifted him off his feet.

An agonized shout burst from his lips the sound of which was lost in the sharp crack of Green's revolver. Came a roar of rage, echoing and re-echoing through the pocket. The

torturing pressure on the jewel man's shoulder fell away from it. Another wild roar rent the lately-drowsy air. Followed a heavy, scrambling sound, as of some large animal padding over the rock above.

"Get under the rock," Green followed his cry of warning with another shot, and ducked under the shelf.

Crash! Came a last defiant roar. Simultaneous with it, a rock as large as a washtub came hurtling down from over the shelf's edge. It struck on the exact spot where Green had lately stood, then glanced off and fell with a heavy thud into the pocket. The heavy pad, pad of running feet on the rock above told the adventurers that their fierce assailant had taken flight.

"Go back under cover." Malcolm Edwards found breath to stop the wholesale rush out of the cave which Ralph headed. It caught the Rajah, who had halted at the leaf curtain at sound of the first terrific roar, nearly taking the old Hindoo off his feet.

"In Pete's name, what's up?" Obeying their leader's command the four startled occupants of the cave backed through the torn vine tendrils into it.

"Enough, I'll say. Are you much hurt, Mr. Edwards?" Green's first thought was for the jewel man.

"No. I'm all right. My shoulder's badly bruised. Your shot saved it from being crushed.

What got me, Green? I'll swear the thing whizzed one of those blamed darts past my face just before it caught me by the shoulder."

"What do you think got you?" Green's firm hands were already busy with a gentle examination of the jewel man's injured shoulder. The latter winced a trifle under the gentle touch of the sailor's examining fingers.

"It wasn't a wild man. No wild man ever sported any such hairy arm and paw. I caught one look at that arm and paw as it grabbed me. There's only one answer. It must have been a very large ape."

"It was a gorilla," Green made reply, "the largest one I ever saw, and I've seen a few of 'em. It wasn't in a wild state, either. The brute has been trained by some one to throw those darts. Now I understand what seemed strange to me when that dart struck among us on the cliff the other day. I expected we might get a shower of them right after that first one came. When the shower didn't come, it struck me that one man alone must be either nervy, or else crazy, to chance a single throw against a bunch of armed men. It's clear to me now. Those big apes have remarkable intelligence, but they lack the forethought of a human being. Their thought process is detached, mostly. There's only one idea they can keep straight. That's revenge. The gorilla killed the Tibetan because he was sore at him. He followed him to the pocket on purpose to get even with him.

Mark what I tell you. When we razz that camp, we'll find the gorilla hanging around it."

Green's revelation met with a moment's amazed silence on the part of his hearers.

"You're a wonder, Oom Bossy Green. You've certainly handed us straight dope." Ralph shot out an admiring hand for Green to shake.

"Excellent Sahib Green, I have met no other youth like you." The Rajah extended his long bony hand with the air of a gracious potentate.

"Thank you, Rajah. Forget it, the rest of you." Green shied frowningly in the face of praise. "I'm going outside to look for that dart while the light lasts." He bolted through the now demolished curtain.

"I'm going, too." Ralph darted forward.

"No. Stay in, all of you," cautioned Malcolm Edwards. "Green may have merely winged the gorilla. It may come back again in a rage." Raising his voice a little he called: "Come in, Stanley. Never mind about the dart."

"Coming." Green obeyed the call. He had found the dart. He waved it before his comrades' eyes as he entered the cave. "Here's the proof of what I told you."

"By gracious, maybe the gorilla was the one Chuma and the Rajah heard those fellows at the camp talking of," Jimmy said suddenly. "Don't you remember? Chuma said the four fellows sitting around the fire were talking

about somebody that had run away from camp, and that the master would be angry if this one didn't come back. Betcha old Rammey Snout owns this precious pet."

"It is true," the Rajah affirmed with deep conviction. "You are more clever than I should have believed you were."

Jimmy undertook a half satiric bow of acknowledgment. The Rajah had "handed" him one. He knew he was "in" later for a joshing. Forgetful of the cavern's low roof, he straightened up, bumping his head smartly against it. The accident released a subdued wave of laughter at the Rajah's "drive" which the Adventure Boys had been trying hard to smother.

When it had died out Green said soberly: "It's queer the way things happen, sometimes. Did you notice anything in particular about the dead Tibetan?" His eyes went questioningly from the Rajah to Malcolm Edwards.

"He was very dirty," the Rajah remarked disdainfully.

"Nothing further than we spoke of." The jewel man's brows contracted in a puzzled effort at recollection.

"I saw something that showed me he was the one who was really on our trail. The gorilla was only trailing us for pure animal spite. The Tibetan had trailed us as far as the pocket. He trailed us on our first hike, too. And a pretty strong proof of it is—he had only one sandal."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAN IN THE CAVE

DUE to the recent "stir-up" they had undergone, the time until Chuma's return passed rapidly. The adventurers straightened the demolished leafy curtain as best they might, and crouched behind it, in an impatient wait for the return of Chuma. Shortly after eight o'clock a plaintive bird call, one of Chuma's clever imitations, informed the weary company that he was near. A moment more and he appeared among them, smiling and uninjured.

"Strange things are going on over there," he began rapidly. "I have seen something I cannot understand. But this I know. They are a camp of fiends. They have taken a white man prisoner. I saw them bring him, tied, out of a cave in the rocks where they had penned him in. He knows something they wish to learn, but he will tell them nothing. He is a tall, fine strong-looking man, an explorer, I believe, but he has no chance against them. I counted them again. To-day there were eleven. The big Tibetan I did not see. I heard them say he would not return to the camp until daylight. Then they are going to beat this white man, put him back in the cave and turn the cobras loose there on him."

"Great Scott! We've a stronger reason now for going after that bunch than we had before!" Ralph exclaimed savagely.

"Um-m-m. Betcha." Jimmy's hand went involuntarily to his holster.

A threatening, assenting murmur went the round of the group. Chuma paused until it had mutteringly subsided. Then he continued. "I must speak quickly. We must lose no time. If the Tibetan should return soon to their camp, they might not wait until daylight to torture the white man. We must save him."

"They'll wait a long time for the Tibetan, Chuma," Arthur Farley said significantly.

Chuma flashed the Englishman a swift, comprehending glance. "He is dead?" he asked calmly.

"Dead as a door nail. His body is down near a little spring, just off the trail. That's all we've time to tell you now. Oh, just one question. Did you see a gorilla hanging around the camp?"

"No." Chuma looked interestedly at Farley.

"It must be still ramping around in the woods, trying to nurse a mighty sore arm. I'm almost sure I put a bullet through its upper arm. When it gets tired of its pain, it will hit for camp. Now go ahead, Chuma. What else is doing over there?" Green jerked his head in the direction of the enemy camp. "You must have gone closer to that gang than I'd have

dared go. I can't see how you managed it in broad daylight."

"It was not hard, Sahib Green, for they keep little watch. They had no lookout on duty. Below the high peak the trees and bushes are thick. I lay down and crawled on my stomach until I came within about three hundred feet of where they were sprawling on the ground. Soon, five of them stood up and began walking along near the rocks in an opposite direction from where I lay. I saw them stop and all lay hold on a large round rock. They pulled it toward them, then I saw two of them stoop, and guessed there might be a cave behind the big stone. Then the two disappeared, but in a moment, or so, they backed out of the cave, dragging the white man. They dragged him along the ground to where the others were. While they were all busy watching him, I crept on toward them until I came near enough to hear what they were saying. They spoke in Hindustanee. The white man answered them in the same tongue."

"He must be a world traveler, such as we are," Malcolm Edwards' features registered anxious concern for the luckless prisoner. "What did you hear him say?"

"Little, except 'No.' Ram Dhout's fellows made most of the talk. When they took him back to the cave I crept backward to where I had first lain. I saw them put the stone in front of the cave again, then they came on to

the place where I had first seen them. It was then sunset. They lay down on the ground again. All of a sudden, one of them looked up at the high peak. He sprang up from the ground, and cried out. He raised his arms high, made a deep bow and threw himself, face down, on the ground. The others began to look up at the rocks, too, then acted the same as the first fellow. I looked up to see what they had seen. Very near the top of the high peak I saw a woman. She was standing on, I know not what, since, seen from the ground, there seems to be no footing in that high place." Chuma paused as though he hardly expected his listeners to credit his statement.

"A woman?" Arthur Farley echoed incredulously. "What sort of woman? Describe her, Chuma."

"She was tall, and very beautiful, with golden hair that flowed far down over her robe. Her robe was gray, like the morning mist. It was full, like a mantle, and covered her from head to foot. She stood still and looked down at the men on the ground as though she were a goddess and they, earthworms. Then she disappeared as though in the air. I was amazed, and knew not what to think of her. I am no believer in magic, or in spirits. I knew this to be a real woman. But how came she to be at the top of the high peak, unless she dropped there from a balloon, or an aeroplane. Yet how could an airship come to rest there?" Chuma had at

last encountered a situation which baffled him.

"She may be a lone flier whose plane got smashed on the high peak. A number of women have gone in for aeroplaning, you know," was Farley's quick surmise. "Ten to one, she is afraid of this gang on the ground, and has put over a clever stunt to keep them in awe of her. She must have found a way to disappear quickly, calculated to mystify those savages down below her."

"That's very plausible, Farley," Green declared. "It looks to me as though we had a double rescue on our hands."

"Maybe the white man they have shut up in the cave is her brother, or her father, or her husband," was Jimmy's inspiration. "We'd better get busy over there. Then we'll find out what it's all about."

"Good advice, Jimmy. Well, comrades, shall we start?" Malcolm Edwards rose and began rubbing his bruised shoulder.

"I will carry the coils of rope, Sahib Edwards." The Rajah had listened to Chuma in owlish silence. "It pleases me to be of service to brave men. Buddha be praised, we shall soon give these fiends the reward of their evil deeds. I hope we kill them all."

"They merit extermination," the jewel man's features set sternly, "but we are not killers, Rajah. We shall give them their choice, of either turning over the prisoner to us, and surrendering themselves to the law, or fighting."

"They will not pause to listen. They will spring upon us like wolves as soon as they see us before them," the old man scornfully predicted.

"Then we shall shoot to kill," the jewel man made calm rejoinder. "We shall defend ourselves to the death. You understand me, comrades?"

"Yes," came the ominous, united answer

"Let us go quickly. May my arm be strong, and my aim sure," was the Rajah's warlike petition.

Five minutes later the rescue party had left the cave and were making for the trail. At the last moment they had decided to cache most of their camp utensils in the cave, taking with them only the camp flashlight, the alcohol lamp, a small frying pan and the bundle of rope. Night had closed in about them, black, save for the relieving gleam of a few stars. Chuma led the line, lithe and soft-footed as a forest denizen, the Rajah at his heels. Green brought up the rear, keen-eyed and wary. The adventurers used their pocket lights, hand-masked, rays turned on the grass-choked trail they were treading. When within half a mile of the high peak Chuma passed back the whispered order, "Lights out," and the rescuers proceeded in darkness.

The last half mile, covered with cautious stealth, seemed an endless creep to the adventurers. At length they had accomplished the

tortuous crawl to the point about three hundred feet from the camp where Chuma had lain hidden that afternoon. There they crouched, pausing for a breathing spell, before making the last lap which would bring them within a hundred feet of the enemy campfire. From that point, at Malcolm Edwards' order, they were to advance openly upon the lounging natives sprawling about the fire, while their leader made demand for the prisoner.

By the faint starlight they could barely discern the outline of the high peak, night-wrapped and majestic. The flickering light from the fire, however, played upon the base of the great rock, disclosing a sinister row of bamboo baskets, each with its deadly inmate. "Shoot the first man you see heading for those baskets," was the order the jewel man had previously given to his companions.

With infinite caution the rescuers essayed the last lap of the danger trail, arriving soundlessly at the place where the perilous work of the night was about to begin. They could see the dark faces of the loungers plainly now. Each man's eyes became riveted upon a huge, brown hairy shape, squatted on the ground at the left of the fire. It crouched there, shoulders hunched, its great, hairy right paw supporting its left arm at the elbow while it tenderly licked its shattered left upper arm.

In the same moment the watchers had glimpsed the gorilla it raised its ugly head and

began sniffing the air. Green had previously warned his comrades that the gorilla, if it had returned to the camp, would undoubtedly be the first to detect their near presence. "Hand it the first shot," he had counseled. "It's bad medicine."

The jewel man rose, the mute signal to advance. His companions responded instantly, revolvers drawn, and the brave little band moved swiftly forward toward the firelight. In that swift moment of advance a screaming roar of mingled fear and animal rage assailed the stillness of the night. It warned the recumbent natives about the fire of the invaders' presence, bringing them to their feet in a twinkling.

"Stand where you are," Malcolm Edwards' stern challenge was lost in a series of wild yells as the brown men charged upon the invaders, dahs flashing. Ram Dhout's men knew but one trade, that of the killer. He had made no mistake in the selection of men for a murder squad. They came fiercely on, howling like famished wolves, their dark, vengeful faces alive with surprised hatred.

Crack! The Rajah's revolver spoke, a fraction of a second ahead of the jewel man's command "Fire." The foremost native, now only a few feet from Malcolm Edwards, threw up his arms and plunged heavily forward, his dah leaving his hand to fall harmlessly among the invading group.

Six other revolvers blazed out destruction

to the maddened brown men. Green's gun, trained on a brownie who was making a dash toward the cobra baskets, barked out death to the runner an instant afterward. Three other brown men besides him and the leader had also fallen under the adventurers' defensive fire. Two of the six survivors from the raking fire, turned, fleeing desperately away from the fight. A neatly-aimed bullet from Farley's gun caught one of the fleeing brownies in the thigh, putting an end to his frenzied flight. He crumpled, dropping in a heap upon the ground. Chuma put the other runner effectually out of the fight.

Four of the enemy combatants, however, leaped into the very faces of the white men, slashing furiously with their razor-edged dahs. Jimmy fired almost against the heart of one of the four as he glimpsed the flash of the brown man's great knife over Ralph's head. A badly-aimed dah slash at the Rajah caught Bret on the point of his left shoulder, shearing through his corduroy sleeve and biting into his flesh. Almost instant with the slash of the knife the wielder of it fell back, a bullet from the Rajah's revolver penetrating his brain.

Arthur Farley shot one of the two still surviving brown men as the fellow lunged furiously at the Englishman's heart. Bret barely saved his head on his shoulders by pumping three bullets into his assailant's chest. It was a whirl of fierce combat while it lasted, but it did not last long. The murder-mad natives had

small chance against the defensive gun fire of the cool-headed rescue party.

"All down!" Green's stentorian call brought his comrades to a sudden realization that they were standing alone on the battlefield, the ghastly proof of victory at their feet.

"Great Jumping Jupiter! I feel like a killer. They hadn't much show against our guns." Shocked horror was stamped upon Ralph's youthful features.

"Buck up. If you really felt like a killer you'd be swanking over this clean-up." Green spoke with rough practicality. "Don't feel bad because you just missed getting it in the neck yourself. Jimmy saved your head on your shoulders for you by a daisy shot. Some gunman, that boy."

"Shut up, Green. You see too much," Jimmy mumbled. "I—I'm glad I got the fiend right." He was still "shaky" over Ralph's narrow escape from the brown man's murderous knife.

"By Jiminy. I feel sorry for myself; not these blamed wolves. One of them all but handed me my finish. I owe you my life, Rajah." Pale, and unsmiling, Bret turned in solemn gratitude to the Rajah.

"It was a pleasure to me to shoot the miserable dog." The Rajah, evidently, was not regretful of the night's casualties. "These brutes thought only of killing us. They stopped not to listen to the Sahib Edwards' command. They are no more to be considered than was

the cobra, intended for the Sahib Farley by Ram Dhout, which the Sahib Green shot. These, also, were the cobras of Ram Dhout, placed here by him to bring us death. As prisoners they would have been a curse to us all."

There was cold-blooded truth in the Rajah's forceful argument. Still the adventurers had the Occidental regard for human life which seems generally lacking in the Oriental. They had defended their lives against the furious onslaught made upon them by the brown men, but they were not happy over the sweeping result of the defense.

"Bret, you need first aid. Off with your coat." The jewel man had been taking quick stock of the condition of his little band. The firelight had shown him a dark, spreading stain on the right sleeve of Bret's corduroy coat. "Wait, let me help you." He assisted Bret to remove the coat.

"Oh, I'm all right," Bret insisted manfully. His usually ruddy cheeks lacked color, however. His slashed shoulder was bleeding profusely, and had begun to pain him heavily.

"A bad cut," commented Mr. Edwards as he deftly cut away the sleeve of Bret's blouse and examined his wound. Very gently he applied first aid to the ugly slash in Bret's shoulder. "If it doesn't show sign of closing by daylight, I'll have to take a few stitches in it."

"Won't that be fine?" In spite of pain, Bret's cheery smile flashed out briefly.

"Thank Providence the dah didn't sheer straight through the bone." His task carefully completed, the jewel man looked up from it to note Chuma as missing from the group. "Where is Chuma?" he inquired anxiously.

"He has gone to look up the two brownies who tried to bolt. I got one of them through the thigh, I'm fairly positive of it by the way he fell. Chuma thinks he bumped the other one off. Here he comes." Farley pointed. Chuma was just emerging from the shadows into the firelight. He came in an opposite direction from that in which the adventurers had approached the enemy camp.

"It is as you thought, my Sahib. You wounded your man in the thigh. He cannot move. The other is dead. We had best bring the wounded one here for first aid."

"We'll see to him at once. Lead us to him, Chuma. I must advise our keeping together. It is possible there may be more of these brownies in the offing. You may not have seen all of Ram Dhout's men while scouting."

"It may be so, Sahib Edwards. Still, I believe there were no others except the Tibetan," Chuma replied with conviction. "We shall do well to keep together until we have become certain of it."

They found the wounded native lying just beyond the radius of the firelight, on the exact spot where Farley had seen him fall. He was half unconscious from the pain of his wound,

and showed no interest in his captors. He was a tall, lank, heavy-boned fellow, a decided weight to Green and Farley who carried him into the firelight, depositing him on the ground near the fire for treatment of his wound.

"Our next duty is toward the prisoner." Malcolm Edwards finally rose with relief from his unwelcome task. "This fellow's thigh bone hasn't been shattered. Your bullet seems to have passed straight through the fleshy part of his thigh. He's helpless, though. He can't make a get-away. I'll tie his arms and chance leaving him here by the fire until we have released the white man from the cave. Shall we go now?" He addressed the question generally to his companions.

"The sooner, the better," Farley said heartily. "Show us the cave, Chuma."

Chuma led the way to the cave which was not much farther away from the camp fire than was the spot where the adventurers had come upon the brown man Farley had wounded. Back against the rocks it was very dark and the camp flashlight again came into useful play, disclosing the large round stone Chuma had seen Ram Dhout's men remove when they had brought the prisoner out into the open.

"I am going to call out to him," murmured the jewel man. "To hear the voice of a white man will not startle him, as we should be likely to do if we pulled the stone away from the cave mouth without first having hailed him.

Hello, in there!" He raised his voice in a cheery hail. "Hello, Stranger. We are friends."

Came a moment of silence, then a voice replied huskily: "Thank God for His mercy. Hello, my friends."

"All right. We'll be with you in a moment." Farley, Green and Malcolm Edwards lay hold on the stone, which sealed the cave mouth. It gave way suddenly almost throwing the trio backward off their feet. They sprang away from it, and it rolled a little way along the hard earth.

"I can't believe I am seeing white, friendly faces, again," came in half quavering tones from the man on the cave floor. The white rays of the flashlight showed to the little knot of men, peering into the opening, the recumbent form of a strongly-built man of perhaps Malcolm Edwards' own age. His straight-featured, kindly face, pale and drawn from suffering, was strangely familiar to Arthur Farley who stood staring at the bound man in bewildered amazement.

"You certainly are among friends." Malcolm Edwards was now in the cave, his clasp knife flashing as he cut the tightly-drawn, torturing cords which bound the stranger. The latter had been bound, hand and foot, making it impossible for him to do other than lie in the position in which his captors had left him. The tough cords cut away, the jewel man at once

began chafing the stranger's arms. Farley and Green were now in the cave and busy with the white man's legs.

"How came you here on this nightmare island?" The newly-liberated prisoner was now sitting up, braced by Mr. Edwards' arm. "Where are those brown fiends? Once to-night I thought I heard a shot. I supposed it might be the Tibetan. He has shot four of his gang since I was captured by them. He is the worst of all."

"You heard a shot, all right enough; several of 'em," Green declared cheerfully. "*Was* the worst," he corrected. "The Tibetan's done, and all but one of the others. He's been laid up for repairs."

"I believe this night in the power of prayer," came the reverent answer. "I prayed for help. I have received it."

The helmets of the adventurers were lifted for an instant in reverence of the stranger's faith in a Higher Power.

"I can walk. Help me to my feet, and I will show you," the man said eagerly. "It's night outside, isn't it? It was always night in here. And at daylight I was to be turned over to the cobras!"

"Yes, we heard you had that little treat in store for you. That's what hustled us out here, pronto." Ralph's lively sally brought a wan smile to the newly-rescued man's pale features. "I know who you are. Believe me, it's

a happy night for me." Ralph's face lighted in sudden delighted recognition. "You are Ronald Atherton, the explorer. I heard you lecture on Egypt one night in New York City when I was only about fourteen. I never forgot you, or your lecture."

"Now *I* know why your face seemed so familiar the moment I first saw you." Arthur Farley's hand went up in a recognizing gesture. "You were once entertained at the Explorers' Club in London on a night when I was present at the reception. I was obliged to leave the reception before I had an opportunity to meet you. I always regretted it."

"You never dreamed you would meet me again under such circumstances, did you?" Atherton was out of the cave now, and standing rather shakily erect.

"Good Heavens; no." Farley had grasped the explorer's hand in a delighted shake. "Let's get back to the campfire where we can make you fairly comfortable, and have a chin-chin. There is going to be plenty to say on both sides."

"I am sure of it." The explorer threw back his broad shoulders, seeming to derive new strength from the blessed relief of rescue. He stepped out stiffly, surrounded by his rescuers, as they turned their faces toward the firelight. "Did you kill the gorilla, too?" he asked, as with sudden recollection. "If not, look out for him, and his darts."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LONG-CLOSED DOORWAY

"GREAT Guns! I forgot all about the blamed beast!" Green exclaimed in consternation. "That's bad."

"We are all equally guilty. I thought I saw it run off into the dark when the fight began." The jewel man's face registered anxious vexation at his own oversight.

"It ran away. I saw it," the Rajah now affirmed. He had preserved the dignified silence of his rank, awaiting a formal introduction to the liberated explorer, which he considered his due. "It must be found, and dispatched," he ordered grandly.

"I'll say it must," was Green's worried comment. "The gunfire gave it a fright. Now that it's quiet here again, it will come prowling back."

The rescue party had now reached the campfire. All eyes were engaged in peering into the greater darkness cast by the shadow of the high rocky wall behind them.

"Look out!" With a loud, warning shout, Bret suddenly leaped straight up into the air, landing at least five feet away from where he had been standing. He had heard an unmistakable hiss and glimpsed what looked like a

long black streak, whirling itself into attacking coils.

"The cobras are out!" he shouted again. He pulled his revolver and fired into the moving black coils.

"By thunder, they are! There goes another!" Green fired as he exclaimed. "Keep close to the fire. We can see 'em then and pot 'em as they come. The ape has let 'em loose. Betcha my hat on it."

"There goes something or somebody!" yelled Jimmy. "Over by that rock." He fired toward the rock he had designated.

A frightened howl now rose from the tied-up brown man as a big cobra skated past him. He called out wildly in Hindustanee: "Shoot, Sahibs, shoot!"

"Betcha we will." Ralph accompanied the sarcastic assurance by plugging a fourth cobra, just appearing in the firelight.

For the next ten minutes the adventurers' guns continued to bark. Came a lull in the rapid pop, pop of revolvers when no more cobras appeared in view.

"The dog there by the fire says the gorilla let the snakes out of their baskets," the Rajah said, as he slipped fresh shells into his revolver.

"Just as I said. I hope he hasn't let 'em all out. They've stopped coming this way, anyhow. Jimmy spotted him, all right enough, over by the rock. I'm going to count up the casualties, then go and see——"

But Chuma was already racing toward the place where the row of baskets still stood.

"Give me the flashlight." Green snatched the light from Jimmy's hand and ran after Chuma.

Ralph was already putting Green's shouted intention into execution. "One, two, three, four." He counted eight still feebly-moving cobras as he moved cautiously about, his pocket light in constant play upon the bare stretch of ground in the middle of which the fire had been started. By the time he had finished his count for further lack of material, Green and Chuma had returned to the group.

"There are fifteen baskets over against the wall. Eight have been opened."

"We've got them all, then. We've potted eight," Ralph was hopping about in jubilant excitement.

"Unless there may have been two in one basket," the Rajah interposed.

"I doubt it. The baskets are small, a close fit for one of the whoppers we've put out of business," Green said. "Ask the fellow there, Chuma, how many cobs Ram Dhout had?"

Chuma's question in Hindustanee brought a flashing expression of fear into the brown man's eyes. He hesitated a moment then mumbled a sullen reply.

Green understood enough Hindustanee to catch the word "fifteen." "We're clear of the pests," he announced to the others. "Chuma

and I are going to bring the seven closed baskets down here where we can watch 'em till daylight. Then there's going to be a little more shooting. After the cobs, the gorilla. We've simply got to get it. By sheer good luck the confounded cobs all headed this way. They like warmth. It was cold up there, and they felt the heat of the fire and made for it. They've been babied. Pretty strong evidence that some of the gang we cleaned up were once snake charmers. They always baby their cobs; give them warm milk to drink, and cushions to lie on. Ugh."

"You are correct in that," the explorer said. "One day the Tibetan had me dragged out here and I saw three cobras drinking milk from a shallow stone receptacle. It was no doubt condensed milk they were drinking, but it was certainly milk. Afterward two of the men fondled them and put them back in the baskets again. There is something I must ask you. I haven't dared speak of it before. I—was—afraid—" Atherton's voice trailed away into silence. "My daughter—have you—seen—her?" He groaned, dropping his face in his hands.

"She was safe yesterday, Sahib," Chuma's soft intonation brought Atherton's face from his hands. He gave a great, joyful cry, tears breaking from his eyes, and rolling down his cheeks. "You—have—seen—her?" he asked brokenly.

"Yes, Sahib." Chuma recounted the incident of the afternoon.

"She must have found her way up the rocks that I took. She was up there looking for me. Those superstitious Hindoos no doubt thought her to be a supernatural being. All except the Tibetan. That explains why he was determined I should tell him how I came to be on the island.

"I was glad those fiends know no way of getting over the peak to the other side, for I knew she would watch and wait indefinitely over there for my return."

"What I'm crazy to hear next is how you happened to land on the gravel plain." Ralph, Green and Farley had removed their coats and improvised a comfortable seat on the ground near the fire for Ronald Atherton. Ralph had seated himself beside the explorer, full of boyish admiration for the man who had long ago captured his youthful fancy. "I can guess. It was by aeroplane."

"Yes. Just before dark, one week ago last night we sighted the gravel plain, as you have named it, from our plane. The propeller was not working satisfactorily and I had been watching for a place to drop until daylight the next morning. My daughter has usually accompanied me on my explorations. She can handle the plane as well as I, lacking, of course, my superior strength. We dropped to the plain without accident, and the next morning I soon

had the propeller in trim again. The rocky formation fascinated me and I decided to do a little exploring. She preferred remaining in the plane. We seemed to be so entirely free from even the possibility of human intrusion that I felt safe in leaving her alone for a little while. She is a crack revolver and rifle shot, and absolutely fearless. Besides, I had not intended to go out of sight of the plane. I wish now I had not, for her sake, at least," Atherton smiled ruefully.

"I walked over to the formation and immediately became interested in what I recognized as an irregular stairway, roughly hewn in the rocks and leading, round-about, up to the high peak. I believed it to be the work of prehistoric dwellers on the island. I had passed over this island once before, and had then been interested in its odd rocky formation. I managed to climb up the steps, though it was not easy to do, and stopped to rest on a narrow ledge, situated directly behind the peak and extending parallel with it for perhaps fifty feet. The ledge was not more than three feet in width. When I had walked half way along it I came to a rift in the rock about a yard wide. I poked my head into the cavity and saw, to my surprise, what I took to be a continuation of the little steps, leading down, apparently, into the very heart of the great peak.

"It became dark within the cavity after I had gone down a couple of steps. I had to use

my flashlight, but the descent was much easier than had been the ascent. I continued to go on down the steps, for I was not uneasy about finding my way back. I came, presently into the knowledge that my feet were on the ground. I was standing in a kind of rocky vestibule not more than large enough to hold me. Without my light it would have been pitch dark in the place. I was confident the steps had not led to a blind alley. I believed there must be a way out of the dark hole.

"I hunted for one for over an hour. Finally I got out of patience and gave the stone wall in front of me, where I had hoped to find some way of egress, a hard kick with my heavy-soled boot. It moved, then stood still. I gave it a harder kick and it began to balance wildly, then fell forward, and out upon the ground, leaving an oblong opening in the rock, about a yard wide and not more than two feet high. I had kicked a balancing stone, which I discovered, was so cunningly arranged as to be moved from either inside the little vestibule, or out. The stone was not much thicker through than would be a piece of heavy slate. I lifted it and found I could adjust it again in the opening. Then I tried kicking it from the outside and it fell in. It fitted into a very shallow groove, but the trick of its balancing was something I couldn't fathom. I was surer then than ever of its prehistoric origin. To make a long story short, I hadn't more than replaced the stone and walked a few yards along the rocky wall when

I caught sight of half a dozen brown men squatted in a circle on the ground. I didn't like their looks, and started to turn back to the balancing rock before they should see me. I hadn't gone three steps when I heard a shout, and knew they'd seen me.

"They hadn't seen from where I came. I had my revolver with me. I thought I'd best brave it out with them. I'd come into contact with natives all over the globe, and had never yet got the worst of it from any of them. These fellows closed in on me like wolves. I had no chance against them. They tied me up, and the Tibetan began to quizz me in Hindustanee. I know the language, so I answered him, but wouldn't give him the information he wished. He grew savage, then, and hit me over the head with a heavy club. When I came to myself again I was still tied, and in the cave where you found me."

"You have had a terrible experience," was Malcolm Edwards' sympathetic comment as the explorer finished his story. "I wonder that you have lived through it. At daylight we will go for your daughter and bring her to you. We know a better way to the gravel plain than the one by which you came. It is really a doorway in the rocks."

"You do?" An expression of sudden enlightenment dawned upon Atherton's face. "Then that must be the door the Tibetan laid stress upon. He used to say to me frequently:

'You know a door in the rocks. Tell me where it is. I will make you free if you will tell me.' He seemed to be more interested in the location of that door than he was concerned in how I happened to be here."

"Shall I explain the reason to Mr. Atherton?" Farley cast a quick, meaning glance about at his comrades.

"Yes," came heartily from the adventurers. Each understood the Englishman to mean that there should be another to share in whatever sapphires the gravel plain might yield.

Farley's recital of the facts concerning the adventurers' presence on the island brought frequent wondering exclamations from Atherton. He had heard of both Ashim Dhon and General Wynne Farley from his own father who had been in diplomatic service for England in India. From a stranger he soon made rapid strides toward friendship with not only the Edwards' contingent, but with the exclusive Rajah of Khariwara as well. The Rajah was showing open satisfaction at the telling blow the adventurers had dealt his bitter enemy, Ram Dhout.

The next morning, their task was to open the long-closed doorway through the rock wall at the left base of the high peak. The Rajah knew exactly where the doorway should be. He located it unerringly and they went to work upon it.

It was well toward noon when the stone work-

ers completed their wearisome task. They were fully repaid for their wearisome labor when, with the long-closed doorway open again, they witnessed the joyful meeting between Ronald Atherton and his daughter. She had spied him from the airship almost immediately he had emerged from the secret passage and stepped out upon the gravel plain. She came running across the open space, arms outstretched toward Atherton, calling, "Father, father," in a tone of happiness which brought a quick mist to the eyes of the adventurers.

"I felt sure you would come back until after I had found the little steps and climbed up to the top of the peak," she declared when the first stress of meeting had subsided and her father's rescuers had been presented to her by him. "Then I saw those ferocious-looking men, and almost gave up hope. I was frightened when I saw that they had caught sight of me. Next minute I was amazed to see them bow down to me and fall on their faces on the ground. I guessed they had taken me for some sort of spirit. You see, I had wrapped the gray rain sheet we carry around me, for I felt chilly. The pins had come out of my hair as I climbed, and it was hanging loose upon my shoulders. I saw very quickly the advantage I had over them, and made a sudden disappearance behind the peak. I was sure then they knew nothing about the ledge behind it. I wanted them to believe I had vanished in thin air."

"Tell the beautiful mem sahib she puzzled me greatly," Chuma requested Arthur Farley. Chuma had become decidedly "girl-shy."

"I will." Farley was delighted with the opportunity to address a remark to Marjorie Atherton. He thought her the most beautiful young woman he had ever before seen.

"You were very brave to steal so close to those terrible men," Miss Atherton said sweetly to Chuma. Farley had only succeeded in adding to Chuma's confusion by recounting to her the details of his man's hazardous scouting expedition. "I appeared to them three times," she continued. "I dared not follow the steps downward for fear of suddenly coming out among them. I was almost sure that was what Father had done. If he had—I was afraid to think much about it. Such men as those I saw take few prisoners. I hoped, by appearing occasionally on the ledge, that I might see him—if he was a prisoner. The third time I appeared to them I saw a new face among them. The new man did not bow down to me. He stood still, and stared up at me, smiling. He looked like an angry tiger, showing its fangs. I knew I had not deceived him. I made up my mind to shoot him, at sight, if ever he found the way over the rocks to this side. From then on I stayed in the plane, ready to shoot, then bring the plane into quick flight. It was like a terrible nightmare. It's over, thank God." She

leaned rather weakly against her father's encircling arm.

"It is not yet over for us," Malcolm Edwards said energetically. "The ringleader of this band of wolves is still to be reckoned with. We believe he is on his way to the island now on a yacht, another choice collection of cutthroats with him. Chuma heard his men say they were expecting his return at any time."

"Have you considered the possibility that this man, Ram Dhout, might return to the island in an airplane?" was Atherton's reflective question.

"We have spoken of that very contingency several times. The Rajah is of the opinion that the odds are against it. He believes Ram Dhout will return on a ship with a considerable force of natives with the idea of wiping us off the island. Even though he should charter, or buy, a cabin plane he could not bring much of a force against us," replied the jewel man. "One thing is certain. Whatever means of transportation Ram Dhout may employ to bring him to the island, he is heading for what he deserves—crushing defeat."

CHAPTER XIX

THE RETURN OF RAM DHOUT

FOLLOWING the joyful reunion of the Athertons the adventurers did not remain long with them on the gravel plain. There was disagreeable work still to be done on the other side of the rocky wall. The bodies of the justly-slain brown men were yet to be buried. There was a remote possibility of the prisoner wriggling out of his bonds and effecting a temporary escape, and the dart-casting gorilla was still at large.

Directly after they had brought Atherton from the cave to the campfire, Ralph had made coffee and fried bacon over the invaluable alcohol lamp. With sandwiches from their knapsacks the adventurers and their guest had eaten a satisfying meal. Left to themselves again they realized they were very hungry. Returned through the dark little passage to the other side of the wall, they prepared a hasty snack and ate it with the keen relish of hungry men.

They had promised the Athertons they would pay their new friends a brief call toward sunset for the purpose of discussing the best plan of future action for all concerned. Since the explorer had been invited to join the jewel hunt, soon to begin on the gravel plain, it became necessary to consider the Athertons' present

lonely situation on the other side of the rocky wall. The presence of Marjorie Atherton among them caused Malcolm Edwards to advocate to his comrades the advisibility of the Athertons accompanying them to the yacht, there to remain as guests until the jewel hunters should return to the gravel plain and begin their work of digging for sapphires. He argued that the plane could be brought over to one of the grassy spaces nearer the shore, off which the *Swallow* had anchored, and a rough hangar improvised to protect it from bad weather.

"How in Sam Hill are we going to bury the casualties when we've nothing to dig a trench with?" was Farley's perplexed question. as the group were finishing their repast.

"That problem hadn't occurred to me until about five minutes ago," the jewel man admitted. "I see only one thing to be done in the matter. We had best lay them decently in the cave where they had Atherton corralled, and replace the stone against it. It won't be specially easy of accomplishment, yet it seems more satisfactory to me than would be an attempt at digging a trench with sharp pieces of rock, for instance."

"Let's go to it, then, and have it done with," Green proposed. "Too bad Ram Dhout can't see the layout down there. It would give him some jolt."

The memory of the depressing task was likely to remain indefinitely with the unwilling under-

takers of a murderous foe. It was well toward sunset when they had placed the last stiffened form in the cave and hurriedly sealed it with the great stone. Before disposing of the bodies of the dead brown men, Mr. Edwards had given the prisoner food, which he had snatched greedily, redressed his wound and endeavored to make him as comfortable as was possible in the circumstances.

A red sunset was ablaze in the west when the adventurers once more took the secret route to the gravel plain for their call on the Athertons. Once they had gained the plain they had only a few hundred yards to go before reaching the explorer's airplane. The Athertons were out of the plane, watching for their guests. The explorer conducted them into the cozy cockpit of the airship which held them all with a little crowding. Marjorie Atherton had prepared a feast in honor of her father's rescuers and the congenial company were soon in the midst of a pleasant social session.

"Hark!" Breaking off abruptly in the middle of a sentence, Ronald Atherton suddenly held up his hand for silence. In the hush which followed the exclamation the now tensed listeners heard a distant sound which brought them quickly to their feet. Atherton led the rush out of the plane, pointing triumphantly up at the sky. "I knew it," he shouted. "It's a type of airship known as a pursuit plane. Bring me my glass, Marjorie. That plane's acting

queerly. It's going to drop. Hard to say on which side of the wall, though. That seems to be something the pilot isn't sure about. Ah!" His daughter had now thrust the glasses into his hands. "That's better. There are two men in it. Their plane was headed for a drop over here, I surmise. Then they picked us up. That's what's bothering them. They are going to drop on the other side, rather close to the wall."

"Ram Dhout!" came as in one voice from the excited group of watchers.

"I believe it," Atherton agreed.

"If we hurry we can come up to him before he finds that open doorway. Best bring your daughter with us, Mr. Atherton." Hand on holster, Green started at a speedy run for the passage in the rocks.

"Indeed, I am going with you." Marjorie Atherton, now attired in the regulation togs of the flier, was calmly tucking a revolver into a very businesslike gun belt which she had just hastily slipped on about her waist. Farley offered her a hand and she kept pace with him in the dash that began for the passage.

When the little stream of runners presently broke out of the rocky doorway, their searching gaze picked up the pursuit plane now resting on the ground. In the same instant they caught sight of a tall, robed figure running madly toward the spot where the prisoner lay. The latter had managed to raise himself sufficiently

to see the other's approach, and was howling like a badly-frightened dog.

Came a terrific roar from a new entrant into the drama. Out from some hidden nook where it had lain concealed ran the gorilla, straight toward the tall-robed man. It fell at his feet, fawning upon him and uttering hoarse cries of affection.

"Peace, Churpo." The newcomer spurned the great ape with a sandaled foot, continuing toward the prisoner.

The adventurers were now within a few yards of him, racing at top speed. Quick as they were, the robed man was a shade quicker. They saw him bend over the prisoner. Came the flash of a great knife buried in the brown man's heart. "Dog," the runners heard in Hindustanee as they closed in about the robed man, "you have betrayed me to these foreign pigs."

"I have checkmated you at last, Ram Dhout!" The Rajah's voice had achieved staccato heights. "Except that I wish justice to claim you my knife should find your black, treacherous heart."

The two old men, features terrible with their mutual hatred, faced each other, glaring like two wild beasts met for battle. Malcolm Edwards sprang between them. Came an enraged roar. A huge hairy arm flung the jewel man violently to the ground as the gorilla bounded, snarling, to his master, wrapping Ram Dhout's bony shoulders with his well arm.

"Beast. Keep off me." In his anger Ram Dhout caught the gorilla's wounded arm in a vicelike grip, at the same time pushing the defending animal away from him with all his strength.

The great ape stumbled backward a few steps, roaring with pain. The stern-eyed circle of men, startled at the gorilla's swift bound into their midst, had sprung back a little, for the instant bereft by their amazement of the power to act. In that instant the gorilla leaped savagely at Ram Dhout. He caught up his master, shaking him in a blind fury of new-born hate.

"Crack, crack!" Green fired just as the gorilla flung Ram Dhout upon the ground with vengeful force. The robed man groaned feebly then lay still. The gorilla flung up its powerful arms and fell forward upon the broken body of its dead master.

"It was the will of Buddha that I should not kill Ram Dhout. He raised up a demon, and in time it turned upon him and brought him to death." The Rajah seemed to have forgotten the presence of the adventurers, momentarily too completely dazed for speech. He stood looking down at his now lifeless enemy and the dead beast that had been the only one who had ever given Ram Dhout affection. "Now will the island of my Rajah be at peace," he said solemnly. "I shall have no more trouble."

CHAPTER XX

THE LAST COBWEB

FIVE months had sped since the eventful sunset evening when the adventurers had witnessed the terrible death of the Rajah's enemy, Ram Dhout.

More horrified even than the adventurers had been the pilot of the pursuit plane which had brought Ram Dhout to the island. He had been hired by the Tibetan for the sum of fifty thousand rupees to pilot Ram Dhout to the island, entirely ignorant of the true state of affairs there. He had shown the adventurers his credentials which proved him to have been four times an ace in the World War, enlisted in the English air service. He had begged earnestly to be permitted to fly away from the island at once, and his request had been granted. The adventurers had had enough of prisoners to last them in memory, indefinitely.

A week of rest, lounging at ease on their snug yacht had broken the horror spell and one bright morning the sapphire hunters went ashore, ready for work. They had gone through the same patient labor of digging and gravel washing which had characterized other jewel hunts they had been on. The sapphires were there, however, blue and plentiful with occasionally the find of a "hummer" of a white one to break

the steady monotony of good luck which attended their success in unearthing blue shiners.

"Notice the lazy pair," said Ralph as Jimmy and Bret came in from a long day's delving on the gravel plain.

"Oh, I don't care anything about blue shiners. Show me something else." Ralph made an indolent pass at Jimmy who was proudly displaying a particularly fine stone he had found that day.

"Wait till you see the white boy Green nabbed from the gravel to-day. You'll come to life then," Jimmy predicted.

Presently Green came in from the shiner patch and displayed, smilingly, the day's prize. One by one the jewel hunters drifted into their camp, pitched near the Athertons' plane. Chuma and the Rajah came in last. The Rajah's lean face wore, according to Jimmy, a "wise old bird" expression which meant he had something of interest to tell.

"What's on your mind, Rajah of Khariwara?" Ralph had recognized the knowing look on the old man's face at first glance.

"At supper I will tell you." The Rajah majestically retired into the tent looking more like a wise old bird than ever in his short white tunic and flaring linen turban.

"The time has come to tell you of that which I withheld from you for the best," he announced to the adventurers as they sat at supper that evening. "The death of Ram Dhout lay heavily

upon you, my brothers, for you are not of the East, as are my son and I. It was wise afterward not to speak of him, or his evil deeds. Now I will tell you that I spoke with the prisoner whom Ram Dhout cravenly did to death. It was he who put the cobra in the basket on the morning the Sahib Arthur came from the steamship."

"Good night." Ralph simulated surprised collapse. A buzz of exclamation ascended from his comrades.

"Yes." The Rajah nodded sagely. "It was he. He was the grandson of Ram Dhout, and had no wish to do evil. He was forced into such deeds by Ram Dhout when but a youth."

"How did he get away with the cobra stunt? It was a clever bit of work. He didn't look even ordinarily bright." Green fixed interested eyes on the Hindoo. He had long since given up guessing how the trick might have been done.

"He walked on the dock, carrying on his back a large basket such as street scavengers in India use. The basket had a movable bottom. He had placed the wicker basket in the bottom of the larger basket and laid the roses on top. When he came to the taxicab he walked slowly past it, brushing the side of the cab with one hand until he had found the door button. He pulled the door open, reached in and pulled down the curtains, then set the large basket on the floor of the dock as though stopping to rest. When he picked up the basket he turned the

movable end toward the door and pulled a string attached to the lid which released the bottom of the basket. He gave the basket a hard jolt, then turned it quickly up on end so that the wicker basket fell on the floor of the taxicab with the roses on top. He then closed the door and went on his way."

"I'll say it was a clever trick." Green gave a contented sigh. "That clears up the last cobweb in this Ram Dhout business. I wonder what will come next?"

"Ask Oom Bossy Edwards. Maybe he can tell you." Ralph threw a laughing glance toward his father.

"Not yet." The jewel man laughed, shaking his dark head. "Let us go back to civilization and market our sapphires. Then, perhaps, you may hear something brand-new in the prospect line."

With that one indefinite "maybe" the Adventure Boys had to be content. They could only be glad that, for them the adventure trail would open anew when their leader, Oom Bossy Edwards, should say the three words they liked best to hear from him, "Go to it."

THE END

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